

Children
of Men


Eden Phillpotts



Evelyn Ince.

May 1929.

Belfast.



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CHILDREN OF MEN

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A DARTMOOR CYCLE

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CHILDREN OF MEN

BY
EDEN PHILLPOTTS

AUTHOR OF "EUDOCIA," "BRUNEL'S TOWER," ETC.




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CHILDREN OF MEN

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FOREWORD

THE egotism of a personal note may, for once, be permitted to me, since an enterprise, launched some thirty years ago in 'Children of the Mist,' now reaches its port of destination with the present story. When 'Widcombe Fair' was written, that book appeared the end of the matter; but fresh challenges from life on the Dartmoors, and renewed strength to meet them, enabled me to add certain passages to the total and render the design orbicular and complete. With 'Children of Men' it is accomplished and the purpose may be related in brief words.

Without learning, or bias, or convictions to determine my trend, I have said 'Yes' to life as it unfolded in this small theatre. Mine was neither a great nor a subtle vision, but unvitiated within its limitations.

Given faith that conscious Will is at the helm of human affairs, then a definite attitude must result before the spectacle of humanity; but if the mind be built to accept only unconscious Law as controller, the outlook differs and a resolute trust may develop in man, as ultimate arbiter of his own destiny. Neither assumption can be proved, or disproved; but the relation of a controlling, guiding Spirit to the Universe lies open to doubt; its subjection to Law does not; and building upon this latter certainty, I discovered, in the evolution of the moral principle, full cause for trust and for hope.

Observation has convinced me that moral evolution is upward, despite massive, contemporary evidence to the contrary. For the War and the peace alike I recognise as a transient paralysis of human reason, not its negation. The War was an attack of familiar maladies for which

man's own errors of ignorance were to be condemned, not the laws of his being; but it was an unutterable infamy and disgrace to him, for this reason, that it proves him to be lagging behind the time-table of moral evolution. Ere now he should have outgrown his present stature, and the causes of his tardy progress, his centuries of loitering in the desert, are as plain as pitiful. An impartial ethics can point to where his faith took the wrong turn; but progress in righteousness is only delayed; I have seen dawn upon the mountain tops too often not to trust that it will presently descend into the shadowed homes and sleeping hearts of men.

Fortified by this opinion—the only opinion I ever clung to—my instinct turned from the way of least resistance on easy and level lands and strove to climb, to sacrifice without regret the highest, best, most hopeful, as life itself actually does. Thus only is the vitality of the creator proved in his creation and tragedy achieved, which, according to the measure of an artist's endowment, is clean, cathartic, inspiring and obedient to the laws and realities of things as they are. Irrationalism chokes under this atmosphere: only the humanist can breathe it.

But the world grows braver, for we have seen great artists open its eyes and blow the breath of honesty and truth into its lungs; we have seen the sentimental vapours of the past dispelled in the freedom that art now attains; we have seen the artist pitiless, that his audience may learn the meaning of pity; ugly, that others may find wherein true beauty lies.

By the kindness of Messrs. Heinemann and The Macmillan Company full titles of my Dartmoor cycle are recorded on another page; and it is a source of deepest gratification to know that in the future, when conditions of production admit it, they design for me a definitive edition. His publishers can pay no author a greater compliment than that, and I take this opportunity to thank them for the highest distinction my work has ever brought.

As a man's footsteps in the dew of the morning are the labours of the minor artist; but if he challenge surer feet and greater strength to pursue his quest before the dews are dried and his passing forgotten, then he also has played a part. The masters flash lightning through our clouds of human passion, ignorance and error, or hang rainbows of promise upon their gloom; but for us of the rank and file, it is enough that we make happy such as have only heard of happiness and waken the dayspring of courage in fearful hearts; it is enough if we kindle one valley mist with a gleam of beauty, or pour some few, pure drops of hope into the thirsty and percipient soul.

E. P.

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CHILDREN OF MEN

CHAPTER I

BETROTHAL

ON a day in high summer the valley was full of light, and Auna River, her moorland journey ended, bowed under a plantation of pine and fir, then sparkled forth, to learn what welcome awaited her in the lower lands. Above the stream, easterly, a green hill towered against the sky; stunted thorns broke the sweep of the eagle fern, grey rock clitters spread and cloud shadows drifted over all, to cool the brightness.

A wood massed beneath in the mouth of the vale, and from this dusky retreat there leapt the river, in a succession of planes broken at each little fall by an apron of granite. Here the ripples flashed with foam; here the blue of the sky was caught in the gliding surface between, where Auna's tresses twined soberly, and fern, heather, woodrush cast their reflections into her tremorous mirror.

Two stone shelves presently barred the waterway and, leaping one, the river made a circular sweep above the second and eddied in a little backwater. The later ledge was gentle and its steps sloped to three feet above the stream. It was fringed with herbage and flowers, and here Auna loitered, making shadows for fingerling trout to play in. Through the limpid crystal there shone agate and amber tones of rock and pebble beneath; and these warm

colours were repeated in the tunic, breeches and gaiters of a girl who sat above the pool.

Round her thronged a dozen lesser lives, that wove a restless, ruddy pattern about her feet, in her lap and upon her shoulders. Girl and puppies completed the harmony and made a splash of rich, auburn light beside the river. The Irish terriers kept on the move about their kennel-maid and seemed to flow over her, as the stream flowed over the stones. They nuzzled her cheeks, licked her fingers, thrust their noses into the black hair coiled up under her cap. She was a slim, brown girl with grey eyes, that seemed large for her small features, and a pretty, yielding mouth. She was tall and of maidenly slimness; her little breasts moved under the light garments that she wore; she laughed and played with the puppies; but a deeper joy than they could give lighted her face.

"Leave me alone, my chicks!" she said, and pushed them away from her with both hands. They scattered, tugging and tumbling; then, while the girl tidied her hair and stilled her laughter, the puppies set up their infant barking; and she knew that somebody must be upon the by-road that ran parallel with the stream.

She rose, jumped over the narrow neck of the pool and joined the man who was coming up the valley. The puppies already swarmed round his heels.

"Could you get it?" she asked, and the man held up a large tin.

"Just in time," he answered. "They were starting off with the cream to Brent, but Mr. Winter spared me a pound."

"Are they settling in pretty clever?"

"Yes; they're getting straight."

Jacob Bullstone stood half a foot taller than the girl and was fifteen years older. Now a great thing had happened to him, and, at thirty-five, one whom his neighbours declared would remain a bachelor was in love with

his kennel-maid and engaged to be married. He owned varied possessions and, thanks to an industrious and prosperous father, inherited some fortune. Two farms were his property in the lap of Ugborough Beacon, at the foot-hills of the moor a few miles from his home; while here, beside the river behind the pine wood, he dwelt with his widowed mother and pursued the business dearest to his own heart.

Bullstone bred a famous strain of red Irish terriers and sustained the reputation that his father had won before him. He was a man of good education, great energy and high principle, and he lived a narrow life. He had never roamed, but found his intelligence and spirit of enquiry satisfied in his native environment of moor and vale, comfortable state and interesting occupation. He did not guess that his outlook was limited, for he had been educated at a grammar school and thought himself to possess clearer wits than most of his neighbours. The fact, together with his prosperity, made him satisfied with his own accomplishments and wits. His old mother did nothing to modify his self-judgment; but none ever found the man unfriendly or puffed up, for he was of a kindly, generous disposition, did good things and held it no fault in another to differ from his opinions.

Love, however, opened Jacob's mind to a lack in himself that he had not suspected. He still felt timid and distrustful before the depths of ignorance revealed by his new emotions.

In person Jacob Bullstone was large and heavily modelled, with broad shoulders and a clean-cut, swarthy face. His eyes were dark brown and of a sulky cast in repose, but the expression belied him. He had a low, wide forehead, a square jaw and heavy chin. He shaved clean and his mouth was large and well shaped. He kept his black hair so short that the lines of his skull were clearly seen. It sloped rather steeply backward from the brow and bulged a little above his small ears.

He was hatless and clad in tawny tweeds with black leg-gings and a dirty, red waistcoat. He walked with a long stride, that he was now taming to go with Margery Huxam's footsteps, and for adornment he wore his father's gold signet-ring on the little finger of his left hand and the silver mask of a fox in his green tie.

The lovers proceeded together deep in their own concerns, for they had been betrothed a week; the startling news was known at Margery's home in Brent, four miles away down the valley, and to-day her parents and her brother were coming to the kennels, that they might dine with Mr. Bullstone and his mother.

The cream from Shipley Farm was for them.

Margery Huxam had turned kennel-maid for love of the life and not because any reason existed that she should earn her own living. Barlow Huxam, her father, kept the post-office at Brent as an addition to his own prosperous drapery establishment. He had but two children living, and Margery, who adored dogs and understood them, came to Red House, Jacob Bullstone's home, that she might fill the vacancy until he should be suited with a new assistant.

The families were long acquainted and Mr. Huxam, little dreaming that such a great matter would spring from the incident, raised no objection to his daughter's wish.

She came for a fortnight in friendship, but liked the work so well that she presently proposed to stop on at a salary; and since she had proved herself skilled and had won the affection of old Mrs. Bullstone and Jacob's head kennel-man, he was glad to secure her.

Her parents, however, protested and, after six months, began to agitate for the return of their only daughter; but when Judith Huxam demanded that Margery should come home again, the dog-breeder had discovered that his future happiness depended upon her.

Their courting, at first almost unconscious, proceeded quickly towards the finish, for man and woman were of a

mind, and though a gap of fifteen years separated them and made Bullstone fearful when he found the truth, circumstances combined to diminish this disparity, for the girl had been bred in a puritanical home under a strenuous mother, who regarded happiness at best as doubtful. Margery's experience of young men was exceedingly limited and, to her, Jacob's sobriety, steadfast outlook and fixed opinions were more attractive than the happy-go-lucky attitude of her own generation. She loved him very heartily before he had given a gleam that he also was in love; but her emotion had been of a gentle pattern and thrust away with secret blushes as something near akin to wickedness. She felt a gulf was fixed between such an important, well-to-do man and her young self. Indeed she did not even suffer, but rather laughed at herself for her moonshiny dreams. Then came the evidence from the other side and she was overwhelmed to find her power over one regarded as unyielding before women. He approached her with humility, declared genuine pride and satisfaction on the discovery of her love, rejoiced to learn that he seemed not too old to her and instantly acquainted her parents with the fact that she had consented to wed him.

Barlow Huxam declared gratification, but his wife was not so well pleased.

The match, while in every respect a brilliant one and beyond what they might have hoped for Margery, found her mother in some doubt. She suspected that fifteen years was too great a difference of age; and she professed uncertainty concerning the past life of a bachelor of thirty-five. She did not know anything against Bullstone, or his parents before him; she could not name the quality of her suspicions, yet she questioned Margery very closely and warned her of the step that she designed. But no permanent cloud appeared and Jacob conducted himself in a manner to disarm Mrs. Huxam; for his views of matrimony satisfied her and he proposed a settlement that

could only be regarded as generous. In this matter, however, Barlow Huxam was not behind his future son-in-law.

Twice on Sundays the lover brought Margery to her family, and twice he worshipped with them at their tabernacle. His behaviour was agreeable to Mrs. Huxam and her doubts finally dwindled.

To-day, while Margery and Jacob walked side by side towards Red House, nestling under a shoulder of the hill behind the pine woods, the girl's parents and her brother were already upon their way, tramping through shady lanes upward through the valley to Shipley Bridge.

"I'd best change into a petticoat before they come," said Margery. "Mother little likes my breeches, and thanks God I shan't wear 'em much longer."

"I feel the same," said the man. "You know I'm at you to doff them once for all."

"I love 'em," she declared. "I'll miss them cruel. You courted me while I was in 'em, and I shall put them on now and again—for luck. Petticoats slow your going and be tame after breeches."

"'Twas never heard that man and wife both wore 'em," he said.

They passed through the woods with the puppies galloping round about, and then they came to the stone-built home of the Bullstones—a granite house under red tiles, which covered the upper storey of the walls also. It basked under the hot sun in a hollow notch of Black Tor, while the river ran at its feet and a grass lawn spread before the windows. Above, on the hillside, were scooped terraces where grew cabbage and turnip, and beyond sprang the trees to the hill crest westerly. Laurel and rhododendron made the slope snug; the kennels extended behind the house, while Bullstone's property spread to the other side of the river also and there an acre or two had been cleared, where potatoes grew in the rich alluvial. Fowls and ducks flourished at stream side and the link between

Red House and the outlying cultivation was a bridge of pine logs thrown across Auna, where her banks rose high.

Everything about the place was neat, trim and stern. The hedges were clipt, the ground clean; for Jacob Bullstone's mother was an old-fashioned woman and had lived with a husband inspired by the same ideas.

"The highest beauty be tidiness," Mrs. Bullstone never wearied of declaring, and her son was content to echo that opinion. His home and its surroundings proclaimed the distinction of use, but none other. There were no flower beds, no attempt to decorate house, garden, or river. Indeed Auna was chastened by stone-built banks, until she passed southerly away to the rocks and rapids and the deep mossy pools, where Red House ducks and geese spent their pleasantest hours. Nature strove with man, but man conquered for a little space.

Mrs. Bullstone was at the door and repeated her son's directions, as she took the cream from him.

"Get up to your chamber and doff them clothes, Margery. I well know your mother don't hold with 'em and I hope you won't wear 'em no more."

"I'm kennel-maid a little longer, mother," replied the girl. Then she entered and Jacob conducted the puppies to their quarters. Behind the house was a large exercise yard, with open compartments wired off round about it, a boiler house for the preparation of food, and various buildings on two sides of the square. The red mothers of the puppies welcomed them back and the little things knew their parents. Separated dogs barked to Jacob from enclosures and pressed their noses through the bars; but all were of the same breed and to an untrained eye exactly resembled each other. Jacob accosted a few, then turned to a man who was mixing food.

"The goats are gone up Shipley Tor," he said. For goats were a feature of the establishment. A little flock was kept, since goats' milk in Bullstone's opinion was the primest food for new born dogs.

Barton Gill, though bald and wrinkled, was not so old as he looked. As a lad he had worked for Jacob's father and was now little more than fifty, though he appeared to be nearer seventy. He was slow of voice and gesture, but still was strong and hearty behind his wrinkles and somewhat pessimistic view of life.

"They goats be the bane of my days," he said, "and a time's coming when I shan't be able to keep pace with the toads."

Jacob laughed shortly.

"Must be grizzling—and you only in your full manhood, as we all know."

A mile away walked slowly Barlow Huxam and his wife, while Jeremy, their son, a lad of fifteen, loitered behind them, to play and fling stones; but he kept his parents in sight. Mr. Huxam, a solid fair man of five and forty, mopped his brow and declared that he must rest and grow cooler before proceeding.

"We ought to have hired Mr. Catt's little chaise as I ordained to do," he said. "'Tis drouthy weather and a thunder-storm promising for certain."

His wife, however, did not agree with him.

"You don't take enough foot exercise, Barlow. If you was to walk more, it wouldn't pour out of you same as it does. There's no thunder in the air, else my head would know it. We'll rest by the bridge since we're a thought before time."

Judith Huxam—a daughter of the prosperous race of the Pulleyblanks—was the same age as her husband. A dark-haired, neat woman was she, who put folk in mind of a bantam hen. Always trim, alert and self-possessed, character marked her face, voice and opinions. She was pious, with the piety of a generation now vanishing away, and also very proud; but she had the instinct to hide much of herself from the world, being seldom in her neighbour's houses and restrained in the matter of criticism. She was

stern and never forgot a wrong; but she accepted everything that happened, because she held it her duty to do so. She ruled her husband and her children as a matter of course, and Mr. Huxam pretended greater enthusiasm for her bleak religion and opinions than he felt; but he entertained the keenest admiration for her and, if he ever differed from her conclusions, it was only in his mind. He never crossed Judith, but supported her rule in the home, as he had long since fallen in with her conduct of the shop. Her face was strong and her natural expression attractive, for she had a frank gaze and regular features. But her grey eyes were hard, and while a pleasant, receptive expression marked her features, her lips were set closely together. She never laughed and rarely smiled, save conventionally upon customers. She dressed in puritanical fashion and eschewed finery. Her dark brown hair was parted in the middle and curled up closely behind in a plain roll. She wore a small bonnet and always dressed in grey. Her voice was rather low pitched and of agreeable quality, but she spoke little save to the purpose. Indeed she distrusted volubility.

The drapery establishment reflected Judith, and young people rarely patronised it save for necessities. The maidens of Brent held that if you wanted clothes that wouldn't show, Huxam's might be sought; but for adornments, fripperies and "fal-lals," one must seek elsewhere.

At Shipley Bridge the road crossed the river half a mile below Red House; and here Mr. Huxam stopped, where, shaded by oak trees, there spread inviting herbage.

"We'll sit here on the spine grass for ten minutes while I cool down," he said.

He subsided, opened his waistcoat and dabbed his face, hands and neck with a white handkerchief, while Mrs. Huxam called her son, tidied him, made him dust his boots with a frond of fern and walk beside her for the rest of the way.

She looked at a gold watch on a thin gold chain, then paced to a gate a few yards distant and regarded the roof of a farm that rose under the flank of Shipley Tor.

"I wonder how Miss Winter and Adam and Samuel are settling in," she said. "A bit lonesome after Five Elms, and a poor place, so the last man always declared."

"The last man would have made a poor place of any place," answered her husband. "He was always clever at picking the eyes out of a farm and then leaving it for a better than himself to build up again. And so it will be here; but Winter's got it at a very low rent, and he's a worker and may do well. His zany brother's a mighty worker also. The Lord denied wits, but gave him a strong body."

Mrs. Huxam continued to regard the roof of Shipley Farm without speaking.

"He's a man who'll come to Sunday meeting no matter how long the way," declared Barlow Huxam hopefully.

"And his sister too. One of the Chosen her, if ever a woman was chose," answered his wife.

Then Jeremy raised a shout and ran over the bridge.

"Here's Margery!" he cried.

The kennel-maid had put on a blue skirt, a straw hat with a white ribbon and a plain white blouse. Mr. Huxam rose, while his daughter, having kissed her brother, now greeted her parents.

"You're hot, you dear," she said to Mr. Huxam; but he declared that he was now cool again.

They set out, Margery walking between her mother and father, Jeremy playing with an adult terrier who had accompanied her.

"I hope," said Mrs. Huxam, "that they've made no great meal on our account."

"They have then. We've got a sucking-pig!"

"A waste, and it ain't the weather for it anyway," declared Judith.

"It's always the weather for sucking-pig," said Mr. Huxam, "though seldom enough nowadays do any man let himself go in that direction. A dish for kings, and of such a tender substance that I've never known the day was too hot to enjoy it. But it asks for mastery in the kitchen. If I'd known, I'd have let Mrs. Bullstone have a recipe from my old mother's cookery book. Full of vanished wisdom that book."

"Fuller of vanished greediness," asserted his wife. "People thought more of their stomachs in them days; at least you Huxam people did. The Pulleyblanks——"

She stopped and called to Jeremy.

"Don't run no more—quiet down and walk along with me, boy."

Her eyes softened when they rested on her son.

A cool and refreshing shadow embraced them as they entered the pine wood; then their destination glinted red through the tree stems and Jacob Bullstone appeared to welcome them.

"Punctual to the stroke," he said.

"Them as keep a post-office don't fail there," declared Mr. Huxam. "And how's yourself, Jacob? Still of a mind?"

"So much of a mind that I don't want you people to be gone till Margery's named the day," answered the lover.

"Plenty of time for that," replied Margery's mother. "There's a lot to be thought upon."

Her eyes were everywhere. She had a trick to bend her head a little when she was observing, and now, herself unmarked, Judith took in a thousand incidents, regarded with approval the spotless purity of the place, its thrifty details of contrivance and the somewhat brusque and stark lines of the outlying ground and little grass-covered garden patch.

She had never been here before, but Red House was familiar to her husband.

Mrs. Bullstone appeared at the door and in five minutes the party sat at dinner. The parlour was a plain room with a solid table, solid chairs and a solid and enormous side-board bright with cups and trophies won by Bullstone terriers. A few dog portraits hung upon the walls, and the empty grate was heaped with red pine cones. Jacob sat at the head of the table and his mother at the foot, while Margery and her father were on Bullstone's left, Mrs. Huxam and Jeremy upon the right.

The master devoted himself to his future mother-in-law.

"Margery favours you, ma'am," he said, "and Master Jeremy's like his father."

Judith considered the suggestion.

"I wouldn't say that altogether," she answered. "My children's more Huxam than Pulleyblank; but Thomas, my eldest boy—who died so brave doing his duty two years ago—he was very like me."

"The daps of his mother was our dear Thomas," added Barlow. Then he sighed.

"Thomas was all Pulleyblank, same as I am," continued Mrs. Huxam. "A good young man."

"A sad loss for you," said Mrs. Bullstone.

"No; don't think that. I'm not one of those who say, 'What Thou doest we know not now.' That's too grudging to the Lord. I know where Thomas went, and faith is but an idle word if it can't help you to face the Divine Will. When God sends for a young man, his mother ought to be gay and proud to let him go."

"No doubt, no doubt," murmured Mrs. Bullstone.

"Faith is a fine thing carried to such a pitch," admitted Jacob.

"Yes," assented Barlow Huxam, "but, all the same, when you think on the details of that fatal catastrophe, you feel bound to say, 'What Thou doest we know not now.' For look at it. What happened? Our Thomas sees a runaway hoss with a trap behind it, and a man and woman in the trap. And like the chap he was, without a thought of self,

he goes for the creature's head. But he was carried off his legs in an instant moment, and though he stopped the hoss and saved the man and woman alive by so doing, the shaft struck him under the ribs and he lived but three hours afore he went to his reward. And who did he save? He saved Squire Blake's son and a scarlet woman he was driving to Plymouth; and Marsden Philip Blake was drunk as a lord at the time, else the badly used hoss wouldn't have run away."

"All true," said Judith quietly, "and to the common eye it will always be matter for wonder that Providence worked like that. But no wonder to me. Marsden Blake's not forgot. He was saved for a deep reason, and before we die, we shall know it."

"He was up here with the otter hounds last week," said Jacob Bullstone.

"Wait and watch," answered Mrs. Huxam. "Time will show why my Thomas was called to save that man. It won't be hid from this generation."

Barlow guided the conversation into cheerfuller channels and praised the sucking-pig; but he declined the decanter of brown sherry.

"All water drinkers," he said.

"Same here," answered Jacob. "I only bought it on your account."

Mr. Huxam regarded the wine without condemnation.

"Very good to go with such a rare dish," he admitted, "but my family were never much addicted to it, and Pulleyblanks were famous teetotallers always—though great on tea."

"I don't remember that we were great on tea," said Judith. "Who was great on tea, Barlow?"

Mr. Huxam never argued with his wife.

"I'm mistook then," he answered. "I had a fancy your grandmother doted on it, but no doubt I'm wrong."

"She liked the old herby tea made of marjoram" answered Mrs. Huxam.

"And a very pretty drink too," chimed in Jacob's mother. "I'm old enough to remember it, and I've often had a mind to store marjoram; but I dare say now it would seem very weak after proper China tea."

"My mother loves tea; and I'm all for cider," said Bullstone, "but Margery won't touch even that."

"And never will," promised Mrs. Huxam. "Cider's too often the thin end of the wedge. I've known it happen so. No young man stops at cider."

Judith was quite silent for a considerable time after this remark, and their talk ranged over various subjects.

Jacob felt not sanguine for his new neighbour.

"Adam Winter's making a mistake," he said, "and hardly a man that can afford to make another by all accounts. A very honest chap they tell me, but too trustful. No good ever come out of Shipley Farm—else I dare say I'd have bought it before now; but my father always warned me against it. I shall lend Winter a hand if it lies in my power, however."

After dinner Mrs. Bullstone led the way to her little drawing-room and she and Margery's mother spent half an hour together. It was an apartment seldom used and impregnated with that faint smell common to chambers not much occupied. The furniture was ugly and solid—a suite upholstered in Cambridge blue. Adornments of coloured glass occupied the mantelshelf, a case of gaudy stuffed birds stood on a bracket, and another of waxen fruits filled the midst of a round and highly polished walnut table in the centre of the room. A few books were disposed round the central decoration, and upon a little "what-not" reposed tropical shells. Elsewhere, as the chief feature of a sideboard with a looking-glass back, a large and heavy book with gilt edges reposed upon a red wool mat, while a smaller book lay upon the big one.

Mrs. Huxam observed these two books and her eyes narrowed; but she said nothing.

They chatted concerning their betrothed children, and each implicitly indicated that the other mother might consider herself fortunate. Then, apparently conscious that this attitude was exhausted, Jacob's parent began to praise Margery and declared her to be a good and attractive girl, well suited by her nature to her future husband and by her nurture to the varied duties and obligations of married life.

Judith listened, but it was characteristic of her that when others echoed her opinion, she generally began to modify it, and now, even in the matter of her daughter, she put a period to the elder's praises.

"We mustn't be blind, however," she said. "I think with you that there's great virtues in Margery, and I've watched her grow up and done my best to build her character; but she's not perfect: there's a full share of Huxam. The Huxam qualities are there—good as well as bad. And the good you've noted very clever, and I hope the bad won't have any chance to display themselves. Yet that's a vain hope, too, because the Tempter always takes very good care that life shall strike at the roots of our weakness sooner or later, and touch the danger spots."

"And what might they be, Mrs. Huxam?"

"A tendency to take the line of least resistance. We're all prone to take it, but I hope your son doesn't. In my experience I find that nine times out of ten, when two courses of action offer, nature, which is our weakness, points one way; and religion, which is our strength, points another. And religion's way is almost certain to be the unpleasant one—so certain, in fact, that you may lay it down as a rule the right way is always the one you shrink from."

"Well, I much hope they won't have no difficult and painful puzzles to solve like that," said Mrs. Bullstone. "At any rate at first. If they get used to each other and face life in love and understanding, then troubles, when they come, will no doubt be met in a large, Christian spirit by both, with love to lessen 'em. But I don't fear. There was only one sort of woman I wouldn't much have liked for

Jacob, and that's the light-minded sort—not the bad sort, but just the light-minded, pleasure-seeking kind of woman, who can't see that marriage is a serious subject, but flits after amusement where she may, and takes the whole solemn business of life and death as though it didn't matter to her, no more than it does to a butterfly without a soul to save."

"There are plenty such, I grant," said Judith; "and the men that hanker after that empty sort deserve what they get."

"Lord knows what anybody deserves," confessed Mrs. Bullstone. "The older you grow, the doubtfuller you be bound to get about rewards and punishments, for whatever bounds the young break nowadays, they must keep inside their characters; and to punish for wickedness they can't help be, in honesty, no fairer than to reward for goodness that comes natural. However, I know you won't see with me there, because, in your *Persuasion*, your text is 'Many be called, but few chosen.' "

"And don't life show the text to be true?" asked Mrs. Huxam. "Don't we see the many fail and the few succeed?"

"Leave that. I'm talking of Jacob and saying how glad I am that he never cared for the wenches who put their pleasure first. My son has had nothing to do with women, and you may say, till your Margery won his heart with her beauty and simple, fine nature and, of course, her worship of the dog kind—for dogs draw folk together in a way no other beasts can—till then, Jacob's been heart-whole and come to thirty-five without knowing the meaning of love. So it's all poured out for Margery; and that's why I'm telling you I feel it a great blessing she's one of the self-contained, sober sort—not a gadabout or hungry for admiration. For if she had been, my son wouldn't have liked it. His admiration she'll get and keep for ever; but, if I know anything, I should say he might be a jealous man and greedy as the grave in that direction."

"I don't quarrel with that," answered Margery's mother. "Jealousy—so to call it—ought to be there in reason. But no sane woman seeks to provoke it. He'll have no cause for that, and I hope my daughter won't neither."

They talked amicably and found themselves in agreement, allowing for the difference of their outlook and convictions. Judith perceived that Mrs. Bullstone was honestly and deeply attached to her daughter, and her study of Jacob led her to hope that he might furnish the strength and force of character she held Margery to lack. Yet, within this hour, a thing had much disquieted her. It was not very great in itself, but argued faults in a vital direction—so Judith feared.

The men called them out, and together all visited the kennels and listened to Jacob expatiate on the subject of his Irish terriers. Neither Barlow nor his wife liked dogs, but they were patient under the ordeal.

Presently they walked beside the river and, after an early tea, the Huxams started to return home. Mr. Bullstone offered to drive them, but Mrs. Huxam declined and held the exercise would do her husband good. Margery and Jacob accompanied them as far as Shipley Bridge; then they parted, and while the lovers loitered by the river, Margery's family proceeded homeward.

Judith preserved silence and her husband respected it. She had not spoken so much for a long time. They walked through the gracious evening light now roseal on the fields and hedges. The slow miles passed and still Mrs. Huxam spoke not.

Then Barlow lifted his voice as Brent appeared beneath them, stretched like a grey cobweb on the green vale.

"All gone off very nice and pleasant—eh? You've seen and heard nought that wasn't convenient, Judy?"

"I've heard nothing, allowing for the difference between our clear sight and the cloudy view of other Christians," she answered. "Nothing I've heard, but something I've

seen that was very ill-convenient indeed, and I'm sorry I did see it."

"Dear me—I'm sorry, too, then," answered he. "Nothing as can't be righted, I hope?"

"The thing can be righted," she answered, "and for that matter I did right it with my own hand; but the fault that committed the thing goes far deeper. It was in the parlour, where I sat with Mrs. Bullstone. And a very nice room too. And on a shelf lay the family Bible and upon it somebody had set another book!"

"Dear, dear," replied Mr. Huxam, displaying more concern than, as a reasonable being, he felt. "That's bad! You never did ought to put any other printed word on a Bible, of course."

"It's hard to think of a live Christian doing so. But he'd laid down a dog book on God's Word; and it went through me like a knife."

"It would; it would," murmured Barlow.

"I took it off before the man's mother. I said no word, but just took it off and put it aside and looked at her. She didn't seem to understand. I'll tell Margery on Sunday."

"More thoughtlessness than wickedness, I'm sure," ventured Mr. Huxam; but she continued to take a serious view.

"A man of thirty-five has no excuse for thoughtlessness," she answered. "It was indifference, and that makes it a very serious thing."

Meantime Jacob and Margery wandered till the stars sent them homeward. They assured each other that all had gone very well, and the girl declared how she had never seen her mother so bright, cheerful, or talkative.

CHAPTER II

ON UGBOROUGH BEACON

THERE came an August morning when Margery and Jacob made holiday and left Red House after breakfast to climb a famous hill some few miles distant.

Bullstone designed to visit his two farms, which extended their acres and lifted their homesteads upon the way; and they started, after an early breakfast, with two of the red terriers for company.

The road ran west and brought them through ferny lanes, that twined like a necklace beneath the border heights of the moor; while strung upon them at intervals stood farmhouses in coomb and hollow, where streams from aloft descended to the vale. Round each dwelling spread orchard and meadow and dark tilth; behind them heaved the grey hills, now brushed with the light of the ling.

Bullstone Farm, the ancient abode of Jacob's family, first appeared, and he spoke to his companion concerning the name.

"We were called Bullhornstone once," he said, "and on the old graves at Ugborough village you can see slates dating back far more than a hundred years under that name. But I suppose some busy forefather of mine found it was too much of a mouthful and dropped the 'horn.' And he dropped his luck at the same time. My grandfather, who died here, called himself 'Bullstone,' and there's a very good tomb to him and my grandmother at Ugborough that I'll show you some day. The family's nearly petered out. I am an only son; but I've got cousins in America—in Kentucky—heard from one not six months ago."

Margery was interested by one detail of this narrative.

"How did your forbear drop his luck?" she asked.

"Along of a wicked wife," he answered shortly. "No tale for your nice ears, yet a common enough thing for that matter. We're jealous folk, or was. He had a wife, and she had a lover, and Michael Bullstone caught them together and slew the pair of them. Then he gave himself up; but women were a bit lower in male value then than they are now, I reckon. The case was plain, but the jury—married men, no doubt—brought in Michael Bullstone not guilty. It put the fear of God into a good few wives I reckon. But the strange part of the tale is to tell. He was forty when he killed them—forty and a childless man. But at fifty he married one of the Elvins, of the same family that are at Owley Farm now. Jemima Elvin he married, and he had three sons and one daughter by her. People said it was like the tale of Job—only in that case the Devil took everything from the man but his wife; and in Michael Bullstone's case, his bad wife was the only thing he lost, and that by his own act."

"'Tis beyond belief to me," said Margery, "that a woman can ever roam from the man she loves."

"Such good-for-noughts don't know the meaning of love," he answered; "and you'll find such dregs and trash of women generally end in the gutter, where they belong."

"Must be an awful thing if love dies," she said.

"Love doesn't die," he answered with ingenuous conviction. "The woman that can look on her husband with a cold heart never loved him. True love is what you and I know—built for a lifetime."

"At first I was so proud, when you told me you loved me, that I couldn't feel anything else but the pride. It seemed too wonderful a thing to have happened to such an everyday girl as me. But when it came home, then the secret love I'd hid for you burst out in a sort of triumphant worship, till I felt, even if I died that instant minute, I'd have had more happiness than any woman ever deserved."

He laughed at that.

"You're the old-fashioned sort, I reckon—content for man to be master," he replied. "Women don't think so much like that now seemingly. They want to run their own lives a bit more and be free; but they'll soon tire of that caper and find security is better than adventures. You'll be the crown of my house and my mother's right hand so long as she's spared; and I'll do the man's work and stand between you and every wind that blows if I can."

"And well I know it," she said.

At Bullstone, the farmhouse stood back from the lane at the summit of a steep hill, and everything was well ordered. The whitewashed front of the house shone in bright sunlight, only broken by the open windows, and a great climbing shrub of buddleia, whose purple tassels fell over the porch. The roof was of Delabole slate, and behind the farm, a rising copse straggled up to frontier ridges of Ugborough Beacon. Round about the farmyard stood buildings, mostly under corrugated iron, that glittered silver bright, and in the porch sat an old man shelling peas.

He saw Jacob and Margery enter the outer gate and came to welcome them.

"Well, Mr. Catt, and how d'you find yourself?" asked the landlord, shaking hands.

"Pretty peart, master; but seventy-five years is a middling load," answered the other, putting his hand to his ear. "And who's the young lady? They tell me——"

"I know what they tell you, Matthew; they tell you. I've gone the way of all flesh and fallen in love."

"So they do then; and this will be Mrs. Huxam's daughter."

He shook hands with Margery.

"A godly mother you've got, my dear, and a godly husband you'll have. Come in and take a sup."

Jacob Bullstone's eyes were about the place while he smiled on the old man.

"How's Mrs. Parsons?" he asked.

"Nicely. She was here a minute ago. Dogs I see. When was you known without a dog? I'll call her."

Mr. Catt, who farmed Bullstone with a widowed daughter to keep his house, brought them to the kitchen, and Margery praised the room. It was rosy-washed, of surprising cleanliness and bright with brass upon the mantelshelf and copper on the walls. There hung two warming-pans of ancient pattern and, between them, an 'eight-day' clock.

"You're a thought slow," said Jacob; then came Milly Parsons.

"Wish you both good luck and good fortune," she said, shaking hands with them. "When's it going to be, master?"

"Next November, Milly; and I'm hopeful you and Mr. Catt will mind the day and come along as my guests."

She brightened.

"Thank you, I'm sure. A great compliment."

Milly was a thin, sallow woman with pale hair and a kindly, but anxious face. With her came a pretty little, fair girl of ten years old—her daughter. Milly raised her voice and talked to her father, who heard badly.

"Mr. Bullstone's inviting us to the wedding next November, my dear."

"If I'm here, I'll gladly come," said Matthew.

Mrs. Parsons fetched a seed cake, two plates and two glasses.

"I was just thinking of 'forenoons," she said. "Father likes a snack about now. He've been trying a cup of cocoa, and he catches a nice bit of heat from it. He's a cold, old man, because he can't travel much about nowadays. But laziness don't fatten him. I wish it would. This is my daughter, Jane."

Mr. Catt nodded and smiled, aware that they were speaking of him, but not hearing the words. Margery made friends with the child who was very shy.

"I've got an old coat lined with rabbit-skin and only a

bit worn," said Jacob. "Too hot for me in the coldest weather. Would he take it amiss from an old friend?"

"Not him," answered Mrs. Parsons. "He'd be proud to wear a coat after you I'm sure."

"He shall have it, then, next time somebody's along for Red House."

"Your father was always his great hero," continued Mr. Catt's daughter. "He often runs back over the past now and always says the same thing. He says 'Ah—ah—there were giants in the land in them days, and George Bullstone was the best of 'em.'"

"I like to hear the old generation praise my father," answered Jacob. "And now we must be gone. We're holiday making I must tell you—going to eat our dinner on top of the Beacon."

"And why not? Not often you make holiday."

Mr. Catt accompanied them to the outer gate and, as they went on their way, Jacob praised Matthew.

"Done for now—just waiting for time to throw him; but a rare good farmer in his day, and he's got three understanding men, so Bullstone's all right. A lot of quiet wisdom in the old chap that he didn't get out of books. The Catts were as good as the Bullstones once—yeomanry people like us; but they went down and we held up."

"There's a lot of Catts at Brent. One's a job master, and father thinks very well of him," said Margery.

"I wish Joe Elvin at Owley had a bit of old Matthew's sense; but he's always under the weather—a complaining man. Married to a good woman, though a bit fanciful in her ideas. She was upper housemaid at Beggar's Manor, and you'll find women who have gone to service in big houses pick up a lot of notions—some useful and some useless."

"Father, when he was a boy, took the first telegram that ever came to Brent out to Beggar's Manor," said Margery.

"A funny name for an estate; but no beggars ever lived there in human memory I should reckon."

Their way fell sharply beside an orchard beyond Bullstone and descended into a valley, where through the green and tangled bottom ran Glaze Brook. The road crossed this little water by a bridge of one arch, where, through a thicket of over-grown laurel, hazel and alder, peered the grey ruin of Owley Mill. But now its wheel had vanished, its roof was gone and only shattered walls remained. Beside the bridge stood a tall pear tree—a ghost of a tree draped in grey lichens that fluttered like an old woman's hair from every branch. The venerable thing still lived; leaves struggled with the parasite; scattered blossoms starred the boughs in early spring and a few small fruits annually ripened.

"Still it stands—a hundred years old, they say, and may be more," declared Jacob. Then they breasted the hill beyond and presently reached Owley. The farm showed fewer marks of prosperity than Bullstone. Green mosses throve on its ancient thatch, and the man who here pursued his life was not much disposed to tidiness.

"Who'd think that this was the richer place?" asked Jacob.

On one side of the way spread the farm, with fields round about; on the other stood Owley Cot, a pretty dwelling bowered in climbing roses with two great red firs springing beside it. Margery praised the cottage.

"I always think that the dinkiest little home I ever saw," she said. "But Mr. Elvin's mother ain't too contented for all that."

"Your home is nought if your heart's heavy," answered Jacob. "She knows that Joe is not particular happy, and he gets his cranky nature from her. Yet I'll be sorry if he's got to go."

"He pays his rent of course?"

"Oh, yes; but it drags a bit sometimes. He's had a good year, however; and his corn is above average as he admits himself, so it must be wonderful."

They entered, and Joe Elvin—a tall, thin man with a

long nose, a black beard and a discontented face—himself answered Bullstone's knock.

They shook hands and Jacob explained that he had called on pleasure, not business.

The farmer welcomed them and took them into the kitchen, where his wife was making pastry, and two little boys played in a corner with the dried knuckle bones of sheep.

"Just want to introduce Mrs. Bullstone to be," said Jacob.

Mrs. Elvin, a handsome, big-built woman, showed pleasure and congratulated the lovers. Her little boys came and shook hands. They were a well-mannered, cheerful pair and resembled their mother.

"Going to make farmers of 'em I hope, Joe?" asked the owner of Owley; but Mr. Elvin was doubtful.

"Robert shapes for it," he answered. "But Jack is all for the sea."

"That's because he doesn't know anything about the sea," asserted Jacob. "You keep him on the land, Joe. There's little enough to be picked up off the sea, by all accounts."

The men strolled into the yard presently, for Elvin had a sick sheep-dog and Bullstone readily offered to see it.

"Just my luck if he's going to die," said Joe moodily. "Best ever I had, and sheep-dogs be so scarce you can't get a trained one over distemper for money."

"He's not going to die," declared Bullstone. "He's too thin—same as you are yourself."

He prescribed for the dog and Joe continued to grumble until Bullstone grew impatient.

"What the mischief's the matter with you? Always grizzling for nought. A man in fair health with a good wife, a good mother and two fine, healthy sons. What more d'you want?"

Joe laughed mirthlessly.

"It sounds all right to your ears I dare say. But if you

looked underneath, perhaps you'd find a different story. Don't much matter how good people are if they ain't good to you? Nobody knows where the shoe pinches except the wearer, and you've no right to say I'm one of the lucky ones, because you don't know nothing about it."

"Don't meet trouble half-way, Joe, and keep your eye on the bright side."

"Time's past for silly sayings. Life's broke me and I know it; but why it's broke me, and how it's broke me, be my own business."

"Rubbish and stuff! Get some physie for your bad digestion and you'll soon feel hopefuller. It ain't life's broke you, but your own low-spirited outlook on life. Life don't break us. It's the canker inside spoils all when it works through. You can't help being a melancholy sort of man, I suppose. That's your nature. But you've got brains in your head and reasoning powers, and you ought to fight yourself and have it out, and balance your good against your bad; and look round with seeing eyes and count how many can't hold a candle to you for fortune."

"A canker inside is a very good figure of speech—a very clever thought," admitted Mr. Elvin. "And I'll tell you another thing: it's not much use for them as haven't got cankers to preach to them as have. Us ban't born with cankers most times. They grow, and I'm not grumbling against my lot in particular. I know there's many things might be worse. Only I've got in a state when I don't much like my fellow-creatures, and I don't like myself no more than the rest." *like me!*

"A foolish thing to feel. We have our faults and our virtues also. You ought to see the faults in yourself and the virtues in other people. At your gait, you'll end by thinking life isn't worth while at all."

"I've thought that a powerful long time."

"Well, set about to make it worth while then—and if you can't make it worth while for yourself—then make

it worth while for your wife and children. Do that, and you'll mighty soon find it worth while for yourself too."

"Sounds all right," admitted Joe. "You wise blades always do sound all right; but against a canker wise words be vain. A canker was a very true word, Jacob."

Bullstone preached a little longer, asked Joe to come and see him at Red House and shook his hand in friendly fashion when they parted.

He sighed, however, to Margery as they entered Ugborough Plain above Owley and began to climb the fern-clad bosom of the Beacon.

"There's a man Fate can't tempt to be sane," he said. "And if I were Fate and had the handling of him, I'd give over treating him fair and knock him about a bit. He's one of the sort that don't know he's born. He's asking for trouble, and his nature so poisons his mind and blinds his eyes that he can't see his blessings, but looks through and beyond into fancied woe that isn't there."

"Don't you know why?" she asked. "Old Mrs. Elvin will tell you. His father lost his wits and was put away."

Jacob reflected.

"I'd forgot that," he replied. "I'll mind it next time I have a word with him."

They ascended by a vast but gentle slope to Ugborough's crown of cairns, and presently sat at the summit, with the sun and wind in their faces and their backs against the stones.

Beneath them extended the mighty prospect of the South Hams, a mosaic of hamlet, forest and field, that seemed to be basking in the sun and stretching itself like a living thing. The varied colours of red tilth and pasture were washed in air, brought together and made harmonious. Earth rolled hugely out to the dim skyline of the sea, and westerly the Channel bit into the land, while easterly, Devon rose and swept the great waters out of sight behind her cliffs and ridges. Knap and knoll ascended to break the coverlet of the fields; here woods darkened the land and

cloud shadows, vaster than they, hid a parish in their passing and swept over the sun-soaked expanses, to quicken the landscape with play of light and shadow.

"How tiny Brent looks from up here," laughed Margery; "just a grey smudge and no more. And Brent Hill, shrunk to no bigger than a slice of cake on end!"

"It's good to get a bird's view sometimes," said Jacob. "Steadies the mind and makes you see things their proper size compared to other things."

"But I was angry the first time I came up here, as a little one with a school treat," continued the girl. "Properly vexed I was, because it seemed all wrong somehow in my young eyes that the houses should be so small and the church and chapels no more than spots. And Marley Wood, that had always seemed to me the most wonderful place of mysteries on earth, was just a dark dab no bigger than a coal-scuttle, and the railway a thread, and the great thundering trains no bigger nor faster than caterpillars! It didn't seem right to have things turned upside down like that."

"I bet you were glad to go down among the familiar sights again and find they hadn't changed, Margery."

"But they had," she answered. "I couldn't forget. I tried—I tried hard, but children remember so. I hated the Beacon for days after that, and was always glad when his head was covered with clouds, so I couldn't see him. I thought he was a wicked monster that had gone and spoiled things I set store by, and showed me they were small and mean compared to him. But after to-day I'll forgive him."

Jacob felt mildly surprised at this unexpected glimpse into his sweetheart's mind.

"Who'd have thought a chit of a child could get such fancies," he said; "but I dare say girls are different from boys and dream all manner of funny things like that."

"Don't boys dream too?" she asked.

"Maybe some do. I never did. All the same I like to hear about your dreaming. Pretty I call it."

"No, you don't, Jacob. You'd call it silly in anybody but me. But so it was. I made up things and told 'em to other children. And I tried telling 'em to my brother, Thomas, who was some years younger than me. He had a great contempt for girls, however. He was just short of seventeen when he died, poor little chap."

"Took after your mother, she says."

"Yes, terrible serious, and that good! Goodness was his nature. Jeremy's more like me."

"Your mother's a thought stern."

Margery nodded.

"Brings religion into everything," she answered. "A wonderful mother she's been. You mustn't mind my seeing a lot of her after we're married, Jacob. The little that's good in me I owe to her."

"You're frightened of her?"

Margery considered this.

"I was—we all were. A sort of love we'd got that didn't cast out fear exactly. But I'm not frightened of her now. I trust her so in every thing. Where there's perfect trust, there didn't ought to be fear."

"I feel a very great respect of her, but she's hard," declared Jacob.

"I suppose she is to you," admitted Margery, "and I'll tell you why she seems so. 'Tis her great goodness and high religion. Very few can rise to it; and to everyday people mother does seem hard; but it's only because most are soft. There's a bit of jealousy also. Because even good people know they can't be as good as she is all round."

Jacob differed and held Mrs. Huxam to be narrow and self-righteous; but he did not say so.

"Don't you fear I shall quarrel with her," he said. "She's the mother of my wife to be, and I'll be a very good son to her if she lets me alone."

"She lets everybody alone when she can't help them," answered Margery. "She pours her whole thoughts and all her time into religion and the shop. It was a grief to

her that I didn't go into the shop; and, looking back, I always wonder how I didn't; but I was such a one for out of doors, and father supported me, and doctor told her I'd be a stronger girl if I lived in the air. Till I was fifteen I was a poor, pinnikin thing."

"Never!"

"I was then—you look at my first photograph, took with Thomas and Jeremy. But now I'm—so strong as a pony."

They ate their meal and Margery did most of the talking, while Jacob, his hunger satisfied, lolled and smoked and listened to her.

Presently they set their faces northward and tramped Ugborough Moor, their goal, Three Barrows, towering ahead among lesser hills. Jacob dearly loved the Moor and discoursed upon it for his sweetheart's benefit.

"They are cairns, not barrows," he explained, when they stood on the great hill; but Margery was occupied with her old thoughts.

"Now even Ugborough looks small," she declared, gazing down whence they had come. "He's not everybody, after all!"

The feminine view amused Jacob and he declared the unimportance of size.

"It's not the greatness of a thing in bulk; it's the goodness and fineness in quality that matters," he told her. "Now we're lifted up between two rivers. Down there runs the Erme and away beyond Zeal Plains lie the famous 'rings' and your beloved Auna."

They talked of the 'old men' who had built the ruined pounds, alignments and hut circles.

"Were they half apes, or creatures much like ourselves?" asked Margery. "Father says they were less than us, and mother doubts if they had souls at all. But mother says there can't be much hope for any before Jesus Christ came, whatever they were."

Bullstone laughed.

"And little hope for very many that came since, if Mrs.

Huxam's right. I trust you are a bit larger hearted in that matter. It's not often you see such a terrible, good woman with such harsh views on the subject of heaven and hell as her."

Margery looked uncomfortable.

"It's hard to think so few be chosen; but of course there's chapter and verse for it," she answered. "I dare say a lot more will be saved than mother fears."

"A bootless business," he answered. "After all, there's no higher thought for living man than his duty to his neighbour; and if you do that, you'll mostly find you're doing your duty to yourself. God forbid I should quarrel with your mother; but I won't pretend, Margery; I don't go all the way with her and I'm glad of it."

The girl did not reply and he talked of the Moor.

"The 'old men' are gone," he said, "and be sure they were men and women as good as we, if not so clever. They lived hard for certain, but I dare say they had their bit of fun, if it was only fighting; and as for goodness and hope of salvation, who are we, with all our comforts and inventions, to deny goodness to them, or the eternal reward of goodness? Why in the name of charity must nine out of every ten humans that come into the world be doomed to hell? What did the Lord die for, Margery, if all the doubtful characters are to be damned?"

"Leave it," she said. "I feel same as you; but I haven't thought about such fearful things and more have you; but mother and father have. You must give them best in that matter, please, Jacob."

She was pained and they fell silent for a while. The man resolved to enlarge her ideas presently, and felt a smoulder of indignation that a creed so ugly to him should have seared the mind of an innocent and happy girl.

They still held north over wild lands with the heights rolling about them; then they reached the ancient Abbot's Way, running east and west, and met Auna's stream near

Huntingdon Cross, a granite memorial from olden time. Less than five feet high it stood above the heath.

"Here's the Forest Boundary," said Jacob, "and now we'll get to the Warren House yonder, rest a bit and start for home."

"I always feel sorry to turn at the end of a great day," she answered, "and this is the greatest day, but one, that ever I have lived."

He kissed her.

"And that one was the day you asked me to marry you, Jacob."

"Don't I know it?"

The Warren House stood before them under a ragged sycamore. It was almost the loneliest inhabited dwelling in Devon, and its squat, white face peered out upon the wilderness from under a black, tar-pitched roof. The rabbit warrens spread on either hand and the dwelling lay in the protection of a tumulus that piled up to the northward.

"I love this forgotten place," declared Bullstone. "In some moods—not now, but once when I was younger and less content than now—I've thought it would be a very good place to live, beyond the fret and cark of life."

But Margery shivered.

"I'd have to be broke in mind and body and not wishful to live at all, before I'd live here," she said.

Indeed the spot was somewhat melancholy and calculated to chill a cheerful spirit. Death seemed to have made this place a home. Evidences of mortality stared round about. In one corner of the little yard was a heap of bones, and suspended from a low bough of the sycamore, there hung a flayed horse by a hook.

"I'm sorry for my pretty Auna that she has to pass up here," declared Margery. "She must be properly glad to wind away down into our beautiful valley and come to Red House and Shipley Bridge."

"You should see Auna Head," he answered,—"that's where she rises, in a desert of bog and cotton grass under Ryder's Hill. Lonesome there if you like. Hardly will you hear a bee booming and never see colt or head of kine. Nothing but the pad marks of a fox and the sweep of his brush in the mud. We'll ride up some Sunday when I've got your pony. Now let's go in, and you'll see two men that are so nearly content as ever I knew men to be, for all their loneliness. Father and son they are."

"I know them well enough," she answered, "I've often met 'em coming in with rabbits when I was exercising the dogs."

"The deuce you have! And never told me?"

She smiled at him.

"Benny Veale's a good-looking chap, and his father's a fine old man and kindly."

"I'm hearing things," exclaimed Jacob.

"You get to talk to a lot of people out with the puppies. Everybody's so interested in them."

"And interested in you, I reckon. Well, you won't walk puppies and talk to strangers much longer."

Now came a riot of life in the shape of the warrener's dogs. Half a dozen lean, wiry creatures, barking and gambolling, ran before a man. They worked for him on the warren, and the dead horse represented meals to come. They wagged their tails and saluted the Irish terriers in friendship. Benny Veale followed them—a sun-tanned, red lad in a blue sailor's jersey and long boots. He was carrying a dozen dead rabbits, but threw them down and saluted the visitors.

"Who'd have thought to see you, Mr. Bullstone!" he exclaimed, grinning at Margery.

"Where's the governor?" asked Jacob.

"He'll be along direckly minute."

"Can you give us a cup of tea, Ned?"

"Ess I can, then; I'll make it."

"How's the rabbits?"

"No lack—just getting busy again; but us don't do much for a fortnight yet."

He lifted his voice and shouted.

"Here's Mr. Bullstone come up over, father."

Then an old, bent man appeared from the hillocks of the warren. He walked with a long stick and was bowed in the back and lame; but he revealed a cheerful countenance and proved an elderly edition of his son, though his red hair was nearly white and had dwindled to little patches above his ears. Upon his head not a hair remained.

He beamed from a mouth wherein teeth were few.

"So here's the she!" he said, first shaking Margery's hand. "And I wish you both luck I'm sure. 'Tis a terrible blow to Benny I can tell you, for he's been chattering about you, Miss, ever since he first catched sight of you along with the little dogs."

Benny did not hear this jest: he had gone in to prepare tea; but Jacob did hear and little liked it.

"You're getting too old for this place and this job," he said. "About time you took your bones down to the village, Frederick."

"Granted," answered Mr. Veale. "I did ought to be gone; but I say that every winter, and yet find myself up for one more season come summer again. I'm better this year than what I was last."

"You look very well indeed, Mr. Veale," declared Margery.

"The point of the wedge is in," confessed Frederick humorously. "Death have got it among my bones, and will hammer it home in God's good time; but my vitals is all working very suent yet, and if I sleep a lot, I'm wonderful between whiles."

They entered a rough, unclean kitchen cumbered with trappers' tools. Jacob was not at ease and regretted that they had come. He cut short Benny in some simple gallantries and having drunk a cup of tea, declared that they must push forward.

But Mr. Veale protested.

"Bide a bit," he said, "and smoke your pipe. Us don't have visitors very oft I warn 'e."

"I do trust you be going to ask us to the wedding, Miss," ventured Benny, who could not take his eyes off Margery's face.

"I'd like for you to come," she answered. "I hope there will be a brave rally of neighbours I'm sure."

"You'll be married from the post-office, of course," assumed Benny's father. "Trust Mr. and Mrs. Huxam to do it in good order. But be she willing to go to Church, or can the Chosen Few hold lawful marriage?"

"It's going to be in Church, because Mr. Bullstone's Church of England," explained Margery.

"And when do it happen, Miss?" asked Benny.

"Next November."

Jacob gave each man a fill from his pouch and the talk ran for a time on dogs; then he rose to depart.

"Well, may your love adventures all turn out well and fine," said Mr. Veale, "and the Lord remember you and be good to the pair of you."

Benny shyly took a sprig of white heath from a jam jar, where it stood in water.

"Found it yesterday. Please accept of it, Miss."

She thanked him and guessed he had intended to present it on the following day, when it was probable they would have met at Shipley Bridge—she with her puppies, he with a cart of rabbits on his way to Brent. But before Huntingdon Warren House was lost on their homeward way, Jacob asked her to drop the flower.

"I don't like that sort of nonsense," he said. "The young man made a hole in his manners offering it, in my opinion. I'll forgive him this time, because he used to be a sailor and they don't know better."

Margery instantly flung away the blossoms.

"A mannerless oaf," added Jacob, "else he'd have known wiser than to stare at you as though you were a show. I'll

ask you not to take note of him if you meet him again without me."

Margery wondered and her heart beat a little quicker.

"Isn't he a good sort of man?" she asked.

"For all I know; but the woman that's going to marry me needn't trouble whether any other man's good or not."

"That's true," she said, smiling to herself. "I never thought about how good you were when I began to love you—only how wonderful and precious. Love don't take much account of goodness or badness I reckon."

"Very often not, till too late."

"Then it's a bit of added fortune to fall in love with a right good man," she said.

"Safest no doubt. But I wasn't quite like you. I did take into account your goodnes; and I wouldn't have let myself love you, as I do love you, if you hadn't been better than gold. If I'd found you were light and didn't take life seriously, I should still have been interested in you and anxious for your future and wishful to advance it; but I shouldn't have fallen in love with you, Margery."

"You fright me when you say that," she answered, "because we all know lovers can't see straight; and now I shall fear you'll find me not half so good as you think."

"There—there; now you're fishing for praise! You know yourself very well; and if you hadn't been my sort, you wouldn't have fallen in love with me. And don't you be fearing I'm too serious and like to bore you. I love life and the good things of life, though work's the best of them and wears best. But we won't miss the junkettings and revels now and then; though with your upbringing, I shouldn't wonder if you proved a thought more stiff-starched than I, for all my age and experience."

They chatted very joyously together and then a good thing happened, for in the shaking moss, where a spring was born and bubbled up out of the granite, Jacob marked a piece of bog heather, white as snow, and though he had to wade half up his leggings to get it, he did not hesitate.

"There!" he said, "there's your white heather, and now you've got your luck from me and none else."

"I'll treasure it up for ever and ever," she said. "I've got my luck from you—that's a true word in the sight of God; and I hope a time is coming when you'll say you've got your luck from me."

"Luck's a poor word," he answered. "I've got my new life from you, Margery. All that's coming means you—all."

"Who laughed at me and said I was talking poetry on Ugborough?" she asked, with the evening light on her dark hair and in her eyes.

Jacob put his arm round her.

"What I say isn't poetry—unless God's truth be poetry," he answered.

So they came home together beside the river.

CHAPTER III .

THE RESCUE

Two persons, ignorant of each other's presence, sat nigh the river on a windy day in October. The latter rains had fallen, the springs were unsealed. Each rillet was swollen to a gushing stream and the rivers ran in torrents. North and south they shouted from their drowned fountains and hurried a mighty volume of cherry red and spumy water back again to the Channel and the Severn Sea, whence it had come.

Auna, running riotously high above her summer bed, hung dead sticks and withered foliage on inundated branch and bough, to mark her progress and leave a signal of her autumn frolic. She shouted, wild as a mænad, and leapt from rock to rock, swirling here, flinging wide, glassy billows there, and submerging each familiar stock and stone along her banks. The height of the freshet was over and the river had already fallen a foot from her torrent of the day before. Now sunshine filled the valley, while the fires of the fall flashed on oak and beech and the last of the rowan berries.

On Shipley Bridge sat a man smoking and waiting to keep an appointment. He was to meet Benny Veale from the warrens, and beside him, in a limp heap of grey and white fur, lay a dozen dead rabbits.

Adam Winter, the new tenant of Shipley Farm, was a man of thirty with a fair, commonplace face. He stood only five feet eight, but was well built and strongly put together. He wore a small moustache and a little patch

of sandy whisker before each ear. His pale blue eyes were kindly, the expression of his face amiable, easy and rather wistful.

He had failed at Brent and lost half his capital, an inheritance from his dead father; and now he was trying his luck again on a smaller place, with the moorman's privileges of turbary and grazing. A maiden aunt kept house for him, and his right hand was an elder brother, Samuel Winter, a man weak-minded and lacking in self-control, yet resolute to work, happy in solitude and not difficult to manage.

Adam had made a start and being of a temperate and reflective nature in most affairs of life, faced the future without fear. He was not ambitious, or concerned to do much more than keep his aunt and brother and himself in solvency. Five years earlier he had been in love in a tepid fashion, but his romance came to nothing and its failure left him cast down for a short while only. He soon recovered, but revived no ambition to wed.

Here, then, he lingered with the sun on his back, appreciated the gentle warmth, smoked his pipe, listened to the thunder of the river in the gorge beneath him and perceived that the granite bridge vibrated to its rough challenge.

A heavy network of boughs hid the valley above him. Otherwise he had observed the only other occupant of the spot, where sat Margery on her favourite ledge, now only just clear of the water. The pool beneath her remained calm no more, but was alive and dancing and deep. The bottom had disappeared in the peat-soaked current, and little argosies of spume trembled here with bursting bubbles, while half the backwater was hidden under the honey-coloured churnings of the river. Her favourite, smooth reaches were no longer smooth; her laughing stickles were drowned. All heaved and rolled with unwonted weight of waters, and against the deep baying of the river, Margery's puppies lifted their shrill yap. Above her

crossed the arms of oak and ash; upon the banks the fern was down and the tawny brakes spread sodden purple under much rain. Beneath this point, Auna narrowed to a cleft, where an augmented waterfall now tumbled into the gully below.

Margery sat and brooded, for the day was one of eventful character in her life. To-morrow her reign as kennel-maid at Red House would end; she was to return home and not reappear until after her marriage. Happiness dominated her mind; yet there were regrets. Never again would she wear doublet and hose; and that grieved her, for she loved this attire and marvelled why women should be denied such seemly and convenient raiment. It was a small thing, yet not to be relinquished without sighs. And she would be queen of the puppy dogs no more. The busy, russet creatures, growing sturdy now and ripe for discipline, still made her the centre of their activities and joys. Their eyes were ever uplifted to her, for she was their god—the benignant power that ordered their world, chastened them, cheered them and encouraged them, applauded them, made games for them, flung fir cones for them, consoled them in disaster, shared their joy, filled their little, ever hungry bellies.

Now they nosed her and squeaked into her ears, while she sat with elbows on knees and chin in hands as motionless as the grey stones.

“Oh, you duckies!” she said aloud, “how am I going to say good-bye to you even for six weeks? But half of you will be sold and out in the world before I come back.”

She pushed them away and the pups scattered to pursue their pleasure. They were wide awake to the meaning of water and she felt no fear for them, but concentrated on herself and the days to come.

There stole into her heart a feeling that the past had been too good to continue long.

“It isn’t often what’s good turns into what’s better,”

thought Margery. "My days can't be so perfect for ever, if what mother says is true."

Then suddenly, without one preliminary monition, Mrs. Huxam's prophecy was confirmed, and the rag of many colours that men call life rent for Margery and revealed a new thing.

She heard a sudden howl of terror from a puppy, and leaping up, saw one of her charges in the river. Two playing on the bank had rolled together at water's brink, and in a moment one was over. The current tumbled the small thing away and swept him into the main channel. He now bore down upon Margery, who stood ten yards below, and she perceived that the sole way to save him must be by wading to the central tide, where it gleamed between two shallows a few yards above the fall. If she failed, the terrier would certainly go over and make an end of himself. He was drowning already, with terrified eyes and black nose lifted, while he swept downward like a dead leaf, beating the water with his paws.

She did not hesitate, but dashed in at once, knee deep, thigh deep, all unconscious of the forces against her. She intercepted the little lump of red hair, grabbed him, and then, finding herself powerless to stem the heaving water, took both hands to the puppy and flung him five yards to the bank. Happily he fell light on broken fern, where he lay shivering, shaking and weeping till his brothers found him.

To plunge before the stream had been easy but, against the flood water, return proved impossible for Margery. The river converged and held her now at the centre of the current, where its energies were concentrating for the fall. She heard the roar behind her and felt fierce hands thrusting her backwards toward it. She strove to fight forward, but her long, slim legs were not built to oppose such power. She swayed, and as she lifted one foot, the other was instantly swept from under her. Now she was up to her waist and in another two seconds off her feet and

rolled over. A yard above the waterfall her head and shoulders were heaved up and she tried to catch a rock in vain. Then she screamed, with the terror of sudden death in her voice, and a moment later vanished in the great, amber-coloured roll of the river, as it swept to its fall.

Her cry had been heard, though it seemed doubtful whether a human being could survive that shattering drop, even if the rocks were merciful. But Adam Winter caught the shriek and, jumping to his feet and peering under the boughs, was just in time to see a human arm and leg thrust from the resounding arc of the waterfall and hurled into the welter of foam beneath. He knew the place and wasted no time. He judged that some foolhardy boy had fallen into the water and been swept to destruction; but the scream made it clear that the victim had come to his ordeal with plenty of life in him.

Winter scrambled down the bank, flinging off his coat as he did so. If any thought passed through his mind as he automatically rushed to his task, it was one of annoyance that he should be called to a business so unpleasant. The discomfort troubled him more than the danger; indeed for him there was little danger. He jumped over a bank into the river, found it reach to his middle and then ploughed up from the shallow end of the hole to the deep water under the fall. The place was dark and full of the din of the water. He saw a hand sweep up and disappear; then he left the ground and swam a few strokes to the boiling dance of the foam.

Good fortune favoured Adam, for he came straight upon Margery's floating body, held her before she sank again, got his shoulder under her and so swam the little distance necessary to reach foothold. Then he stood up, gripped her round the waist and presently carried her clear of the river. Not till he found her hair all over his face did he know that he had saved a woman. He brushed it away

and recognised Margery; then, in great dread that he carried a corpse, set out with her to the Red House. His own place was nearer, but Adam felt impelled up the valley.

The girl remained quite unconscious. She was not heavy and he made good way, finding time to wonder what had brought her into the river. Then the puppies appeared and crept in doubt and dismay round him. To see their god limp, silent, still, thus carried in a man's arms, appalled them. They barked and whimpered, but would not lose sight of their guardian and followed in an agitated company at Winter's heels.

Thus they came, until Bullstone, proceeding under the fir trees to find Margery, suddenly discovered her in Winter's arms. The blood surged up to his face; he stared; he snorted and then charged forward.

"What in God's name——?" roared Jacob; then he dropped his ash sapling and almost snatched the unconscious girl from Adam.

"Fell into the river and went over the rocks into the pool," said the younger man quietly. "Please the Lord she ain't dead. I don't think she is."

Jacob was panting.

"For any man but me to touch her!" he almost groaned, to himself rather than the rescuer.

Winter stared and stopped. He was about to explain events, but Jacob strode away, the puppies streaming behind him.

He lifted his voice and bawled for help before he reached his door. Then Mrs. Bullstone hastened and found him already beside the kitchen fire. He lowered Margery to the ground, bade his mother undress her and went for brandy.

Returning with it he found the sufferer had regained consciousness. She could not speak but her eyes were open. She drank; then Jacob went for blankets and within ten minutes had left the house, hastened to the stables and

saddled a horse. He quickly galloped off to Brent for a doctor and Margery's mother.

In time they arrived, to a turmoil of talk and tears from Mrs. Bullstone—a dislocated, agitated upheaval in which Judith Huxam and her daughter alone preserved calm. The physician found Margery bruised and cruelly shaken, but without a broken bone. There was concussion, how severe he could not immediately determine.

He directed them and asked a question of Jacob before leaving.

"How did she get in the water? Not intentionally I hope?"

For the last time that day Bullstone was staggered beyond reason.

"'Intentionally?'" Good God, doctor, she's engaged to marry me!" he said. Then happened a strange thing, for in the morning, Margery proved already better after sleep, and sitting beside a convalescent sweetheart, Bullstone was reminded of one he had forgotten.

With deep emotion he came to her and gasped to see how small Margery appeared, sitting up with a pink shawl round her shoulders and her hair down.

Out of his joy and to steady himself, he blamed her—even assuming an angry manner.

"Properly mad, and must mean a screw loose in you," he said. "To go into a raging torrent like that for a puppy! You never thought of me."

"Of course I thought of you," she answered in a weary, little voice. "It was your dog and I had to save it. But in truth I thought of nothing. I was in the water before I began to think."

The threatened shadow seemed still to hang over her. Her voice was weak and her manner listless.

"I'd give ten years of my life if it had been me who rescued you," he said. "It's proper gall to think that any other man did it."

"You must forgive him—for my sake, Jacob."

"Forgive him! The mischief is that I'm under a life-long obligation now, and he may be the sort to rub it in. Not that he'll need to. I shan't forget that my debts are for ever beyond payment."

"Have you thanked him?"

"Not yet."

She was silent and then expressed a desire that startled her lover.

"No more have I. But I'm not going to let the day pass before I do."

"I'll say all there's need to say."

"No, Jacob. Life's life. I'm properly thankful not to be drowned. Think what he's done for me! If you say a word against, you'll vex me, and I mustn't be vexed."

The subject dropped while she talked of her accident—such of it as she remembered; but she felt desirous to know the exact sequel, and that only Adam Winter could tell her. When Jacob put her off and told her to trust Winter to him, she became quite silent. Then she asked him to leave her.

He went and presently the doctor called and gave a good report. He, too, brought discomfort, for Margery had repeated her wish to thank Adam Winter, and begged that she might do so immediately. She was wilful and strangely insistent, as it seemed to Jacob. Her mother, however, supported her and held it a right thing to happen. The doctor therefore advised that Mr. Winter should see her before she slept. He had found Margery so completely recovered that there was no need to call again.

"Keep her in bed one more day, and then let her get up and stop by the fire," he said. "Youth will never cease to astonish me."

Jacob Bullstone went to Shipley Farm after midday dinner and summoned Adam Winter.

"You've done more than I can pay, as you well know," he said, "and that's granted; but if it's ever in my power

to lessen the obligation, I gladly shall, for I little like to be in any man's debt."

"No need to talk that way. There's no debt and no obligation. Who wouldn't have done the same? Didn't Miss Huxam go in the water herself after a puppy? We do these things, not for any return, but because we must. I'd have done as much for a sheep—so would you. I hope she's out of danger?"

"She's wishful to see you—nothing will do but she thanks you herself this instant moment."

"No need at all."

"So I say—no hurry anyway; but that's her will and she must be obeyed, if you please."

"Them caught from the grave like that did ought to be humoured," said Adam's aunt. She was a little woman with grey hair and a red face.

"I'll come, then, if it must be so," said Winter. "The green plover be back, and I shot a brace this morning. Will she accept 'em?"

"No, thanks; I'll get a bird or two for her presently."

The men returned together. Their walk had been silent on Jacob's part, while Adam related the particulars of the rescue.

"I properly thank you," said Margery, when they ascended to her room and Adam took a chair in the window, while Bullstone stood with his hands in his pocket at the foot of the bed and Judith Huxam sat beside it.

"We'll never, never forget it, Jacob and me," continued Margery.

"I hope you will, then," answered the farmer. "Why such a noise about it? Duty's duty. In fact 'twas more of a pleasure than a duty, I'm sure, and if I hadn't much feared you was a goner, I should have enjoyed the fun."

Jacob's eyes were restless, he frowned and moved about. Then he turned his back and examined some family photographs on Margery's mantelshelf.

"To save a life is a great thing, Mr. Winter," said Mrs.

Huxam. "Now, whatever your own life's got in store for you, you can always remember that you had a hand, under God, in keeping a human creature alive."

"The puppy's no worse," declared Margery, "and if he knew which it was, Jacob would never part with it. But we never shall know, for I don't remember which I saved. You must be terrible strong to have faced that awful water. It took me like a leaf."

"Wasn't the water's fault," he answered. "Young women can't go playing about with the rivers in flood. A little item like you was bound to be swept away."

"It's a wonderful thing to look at a man who's saved your life," said Margery.

"Wish I was a finer object," he replied.

Jacob hid his emotion, but had to speak and occupy himself. The invalid was nursing two young puppies from the last litter. She had demanded something to play with.

"Best let me take them back," he said. "Mustn't keep Mr. Winter—he's a busy man. And mustn't spoil young dogs. Bless it, you're cuddling them as if they was a brace of babbies!"

"They are babbies," answered Margery, "and if you can't cuddle babbies, what should you cuddle?"

She was wilful still and continued to speak in a tired, small voice.

"Are you fond of dogs?" she asked, and Adam declared that he was.

"What's life without 'em, I say," he answered.

"So do I," she replied. "Jacob can't see the human side of dogs—no, you can't, Jacob. He's all for discipline."

"Quite right too," declared Winter. "You must put into the heart of a dog his bounden duty from the first, else he'll grow up a nuisance to himself and everybody else. Work did ought to be found for every dog. If it ain't, they think life's all play and that makes 'em selfish."

"Jacob's the whole law and the prophets about dogs,"

asserted Margery. "They're blessed creatures and nothing's too good for them—you know you think so, Jacob."

"They haven't got souls, however," explained Mrs. Huxam, "and you had no sort of right, Margery, to run the risk of drowning for a dog."

"Some dogs have got far bigger souls than some men," answered her daughter; "and you've only got to look in their eyes to see 'em."

"That's a wicked thing to say, and I'm sorry you said it," replied Judith. "It shows your mind is wandering still and there's fever left in your brain. So these men had best to be gone. You forget your religion, Margery."

The girl was silenced, but Adam Winter, who did not fear Mrs. Huxam, ventured on a doubtful joke.

"The dogs have got religion anyway," he assured them, "for I'm sure the little ones worship your darter, ma'am; and the big ones worship Mr. Bullstone."

"'Tis a great thing to search to the heart of a dog," murmured Margery, "and nobody ever did that like Jacob."

Adam Winter, conscious that his last remark had annoyed Mrs. Huxam, though she did not answer it with words, got up to go his way.

"Mustn't bide no more," he said. "And I hope you'll soon be down house and as right as rain, Miss."

She stretched out a hand and he took it and stood a moment on his way to the door.

"Mind you come to our wedding," bade Margery. "I will have you there; there wouldn't have been a wedding at all but for you."

"I'll gladly come, be sure."

He went through the door, and Bullstone followed without speaking.

BOOK I

CHAPTER I

JEREMY

THE market town of Brent differed but little from like boroughs linked by the artery of the railroad to centres greater than themselves. It grew, reacted to the ordinary stimuli and, upon discovery of Dartmoor as a healthful resort of pilgrimage, enlarged its borders to meet increasing demand.

An environment was created after the usual pattern, and from the village centre of shops and cottages, there extended good roads on which stood single and semi-detached houses with gardens about them. The class of shop improved to serve the class of customer; the atmosphere thickened from its primitive simplicity. Change increasingly dominated Brent, creating an environment wherein to be honest and fearless grew more difficult, while cowardice and hypocrisy were encouraged by the nature of things.

Human capacity was displayed at its customary levels; greed and creed, after the inevitable rule, dominated the minds of men and women and infected the minds of the children. Education progressed, but its evidences were often painful, and, along with it, things worthy of preservation departed for ever. Modern education promotes selfishness and egotism in the pupil, but neglects any valuable formative influence on character—the result of that narrow and unimaginative type of man and woman foremost in the ranks of the certified teachers.

Ambition at Brent was only understood in terms of cash; among many of the young men and women cleverness became only another name for cunning. They were brought up, generation after generation, on the ideals of their parents, which proved a far more penetrative principle than the teaching of their schools. Then dawned class consciousness and class prejudice; and the fresh point of view took shape in creation of new values and animosities. The timid admired the bold, who had courage to scant his service, yet draw his wages. The worker who robbed his employer, confident that trade unionism would support him in any open conflict, became the hero of the shop; while the employer retaliated without patience or perspicuity. Thus worthless and unsocial ideals were created in minds upon the way to adolescence.

The church stood in the midst—architecturally a very beautiful and dignified object. Its significance otherwise only related to form and ceremony. So many had ceased to go, that the timorous began to feel they, too, might stay away without suffering in reputation, or trade. There were various chapels, also, and a few spirits reflected the past and professed obsolescent opinions, while a small minority still actually practised them.

Of such were the postmistress and her husband, Judith and Barlow Huxam. To the Chosen Few they belonged—the woman from her birth, the man by adoption; for Judith insisted, as a condition of marriage, that Barlow must join her particular sect and he, much in love and of no deep convictions, did not hesitate to oblige her. And still the pair worshipped with that mournful denomination, while the Chosen Few lived up to their proud title and became yearly fewer. This fact brought sorrow, but not surprise, to Mrs. Huxam. Fewer, indeed, were chosen, for the good reason that fewer deserved to be. She took a long view, and though admitting that her own generation was painfully distinguished by a lack of just persons in all classes, yet hoped that better times might be com-

ing and subsequent humanity provide a more handsome inheritance for the Kingdom.

Apart from her religious predilections, Mrs. Huxam was stern, but reasonable. She knew that offences must come, while regretting that more appeared to come from Brent than most other places. She was not censorious, though glad to remember that the mills of God always ground small in the long run; and she never wavered in conviction that all was for the best and divinely pre-ordained.

Her husband she honoured and respected, and indeed he was a man worthy of respect and honour. He had earned admiration and applause, for to have lived with Judith through thirty-five unclouded years argued great gifts of patience and philosophy on the part of Mr. Huxam. They worked in perfect amity and their drapery establishment was still the most important shop in Brent.

Judith felt prouder of her own family than her husband's, and a slight to any member of the clan was an affront upon herself. A bachelor brother lived at Plymouth. He owned trawlers and prospered, letting it be known that his niece, Margery, would some day inherit his possessions. Mrs. Huxam's father, Tobias Pulleyblank, a saddler, had been dead ten years, and her mother passed a year earlier. But other Pulleyblanks still flourished round about. They lifted steadfast lights on a naughty world, and nothing had disappointed Judith Huxam more than to find that Pulleyblank blood was not pre-potent in the veins of her own boy and girl. They both lacked that steel of character and indomitable will power she herself possessed; and though Margery Bullstone, the elder child, married to a prosperous man, had done her duty and given her mother just cause for gratification and contentment, of Jeremy, her son, this could not be admitted.

It happened that Jeremy Huxam's parents were now dwelling on this subject, for, upon the following day,

Jeremy was due to return home. Once more he had been tried in the ranks of men and found wanting.

Barlow and his wife were in bed. They retired early and, as a rule, conversed for an hour on the interests of the day before sleeping. When Mr. Huxam stretched his hand for a little box beside him and took a mucilaginous lozenge for his 'tubes,' that was the signal that conversation must cease and sleep be sought.

"Jeremy certainly is a puzzling man," he confessed, "and I wish there was more of you in him and less of me. He's not altogether soft, and he's not altogether lazy, and he's always civil spoken and respectful, and everybody likes him; yet what does he amount to? A dead weight on our hands, and no sooner, after unheard-of efforts, do we launch him into deep water, than he's back on the beach again."

"It's lack of purpose," said Judith. "He's like one of them ants you see in the woods. They'll tug and tug and wander this way and that, pulling along a scrap of rubbish; and they'll climb up a stone and fall off a score of times and get no forwarder. Yet you can't deny the creatures are busy enough. Of Jeremy you can only say that he's himself and made as his Maker willed him to be. He'll never treat time like a servant, but let it master him. That's what our Thomas understood, though only a child when he died."

"True," answered Barlow, "and seeing that nobody can tell how little time may be granted them, it's a cruel sight to see the precious stuff frittered away. Some fools just kill time—murder it, because they haven't the brain power to know what to do with it; and such men ought to be took in hand, like other criminal malefactors, in my opinion, and set to do the world's work whether they want to or not. But Jeremy's not like that. He's wishful to do some good; yet things all fall to pieces when he touches them."

"Incompetence is the only word for it," said Judith.

“And with competence writ large before his eyes from his youth up!” mused Barlow. “Generally it’s just the opposite, and you see children either give their parents away, or offer a good advertisement for their homes, as the case may be. A child’s terrible clever at echoing and copying what goes on around him, being just so remorseless in that matter as a parrot. They’ll pick up the good, or bad, manners or customs and the general outlook of their elders, and be a sort of running comment upon their fathers and mothers to the quick eye that marks ’em; for, unless they are idiots, children will be learning, and we be teaching ’em something all the time, whether we want to, or don’t. Yet Jeremy breaks the rule, for what did he learn except to be hard-working and God-fearing? And that unfortunately ain’t enough to make a success of life, though, no doubt, if we were all nearer Christ in thought and deed, as well as profession, it would be.”

“Yes,” said Mrs. Huxam. “No child of mine, or yours, ever gave us away, because, thank God, there was nothing to give away. But they well might have shone a bit brighter in our mortal view. However, that’s God’s affair.”

She reviewed her children and took comfort in an interesting psychological fact.

“So there they stand—Jeremy, a slight man, of good intentions, but no driving power—and Margery—all right, in the keeping of a man of character, though I never pretended his character was all I could wish in the way of religion. But what shows to me the wisdom of God so amazing clear is Margery’s children. Three out of the four are full of Pulleyblank!”

“You may say they have a big pinch,” admitted Barlow; “and what does that amount to? Why, that the Lord knows a good thing when He sees it. The Pulleyblank character has helped to make England what it is, and if the world of men and women were flooded with it,

the Chosen Few would soon rise up to be the Chosen Many."

"We can't hope that," she answered, "because the Word says 'no'; but Margery's two boys and her eldest girl have got character, and if they see enough of us as time goes on, so much the better for them."

"Margery's got character too—she thinks right," declared Mr. Huxam.

"She does—I'm not judging her. Jacob Bullstone is a difficult man in some ways, though where she's concerned I don't quarrel with him. Margery is a very good wife; but she was always fond of pleasure in season and out; and that's the weakness."

"Well, Bullstone ain't. By no means a pleasure-loving man; and we must give him credit in his children also. They've been brought up to the dignity of work. They're not spoiled."

"He'll claim the credit, no doubt; but I shan't be sorry when they're out in the world."

"The blessing is that they've got what Jeremy never did have," said Mr. Huxam; "and that's an idea of what they want to do. John Henry will be a farmer, and there's no shadow of turning with him, young as he is. That's Pulleyblank. Then Peter's for the dogs. He'll carry on his father's business. They're not particular good scholars, so schoolmaster tells me, but they'll go to work presently, knowing all they need to know about learning in general. And you can get on without a lot of learning, so called, amazing well. Then Avis is handsome and will be married in a few years. And that only leaves Auna."

"To call a child after the river was a silly thing, and I never thought the same of the man after he did it," said Judith.

"It was poetry," explained Barlow. "And you can't fairly blame him. Margery loves the river and she would have it so."

"He ought to have withstood her. My wish was 'Mary.' We haven't had a 'Mary' since my aunt died."

"Auna's the living daps of what her mother was at eleven years old," continued Mr. Huxam. "But Jeremy's the matter now. I'm going to propose that he sees his brother-in-law as soon as may be. Jacob Bullstone will help him for his wife's sake, if it can be done. He's always been very well disposed to Jeremy."

"What can he do?"

"Who knows? We never yet did ask him to lend a hand, and this may be the appointed time."

Mrs. Huxam was doubtful.

"I shouldn't much wish to be under any obligation in that quarter," she said.

"You won't be," he replied. "It's Jeremy who goes to the man, not you. And Jeremy's the sort must be under obligations. He's built so. There's plenty others like him. They give the stronger Christians a chance to shine and practise the virtues. You must have weak members for the righteous to show their light before men."

He stretched for his jujubes and Judith, heaving a sigh, settled down.

Jeremy Huxam was the sort of son a mother is bound to love, even though her respect has vanished and her ambition disappeared. He had a charming face, charming manners and a sanguine nature, easily elated and easily cast down. He was fair, with an amber moustache, which did not conceal a small and pretty mouth. He had large, grey eyes and a trifling forehead, over which hung bright, curly hair. He was a sort of womanly edition of Mr. Huxam, but taller and more gracefully built. Jeremy attached importance to his clothes and dressed well. His voice was gentle and he often laughed. He was exceedingly selfish; but he had the knack to please, and had won many friends, for his own urbane sake as well as his father's. But new enterprises, begun in hope, always

sank into doubt and ended in exasperation. He was an attractive, futile person, and would continue to be so.

Mrs. Huxam, remembering her own mighty influence for good on her husband, sometimes thought that, did her son take a wife, the situation might be saved; but Barlow deprecated any such enterprise at present, pointing out that the sort of wife Jeremy would be likely to choose was ill-calculated to fortify his spirit, or strengthen his footsteps.

Now that opinion of the past echoed with resounding chaos upon his parents' ears, for Jeremy Huxam returned from Plymouth on the following day a married man. It was the second, shattering shock in the lives of Barlow and Judith.

His father went to meet Jeremy, who emerged from a third-class carriage on the arrival of the train, and then handed out a very fine young woman. He beamed upon Barlow, shook him warmly by the hand and turned to the girl who stood behind him.

"Jane," he said, "this is my dear father, and now he'll be yours."

Then he introduced his wife.

"A bit of a surprise, father. You don't remember Jane Parsons, I expect, daughter of Mrs. Parsons up at Bullstone Farm in the old days; but she's Jane Huxam now and has honoured me by marrying me. And, from this great event, there's no doubt my fortunes will change."

Jane Huxam, dark and tall, with a humble expression and a loose mouth, shook the postmaster's hand very nervously and hoped he would forgive them.

"We've known each other a longful time," said Jeremy, "and remembering you thought so well of the Catt family, I was pretty sure you'd be glad to hear that Jane cared for me. And it's the turning point, and it will be like your unfailing kindness, father, if you take us hopefully before mother, as if you was pleased about it."

"We feel that as man and wife we shall be able to get

on a lot better in the world than separate," explained Jane. "Nothing will be difficult to me when I think of Jeremy."

"Same here," declared her husband. "I always wanted a home-grown wife, and we're both that fond of Brent that we shall be a lot happier here. Jane's properly glad to be back, and I'm very wishful to find work near you and mother. I missed you both a lot. Of course you'll say that we ought to have told you the glad news, and you must understand Jane was set on doing so. But the fault is entirely mine, dad."

Having said these things hastily, Jeremy went to see after the luggage, and Mr. Huxam, who had been too astonished to do more than stare and listen, turned to his daughter-in-law.

"And when you naturally asked my son to let us hear about this, what reason did he give for refusing?" he inquired.

"Truth's truth, Mr. Huxam," answered Jane, twisting her wedding-ring, "and I've told him we must speak the truth in everything, else such a woman as Mrs. Huxam would turn against us. It's like this. I was assistant at a pastry-cook's and, of course, I've known Jeremy since we were children, and he often came to Bullstone Farm after his sister married Mr. Jacob. So we met in Plymouth, and I went with Jeremy on a steamer, for one of they moonlight excursions to the Eddystone Lighthouse. And, coming home, he offered for me, and I said 'yes.' Then I was all for telling the great news; but he wouldn't."

"And why wouldn't he? There must have been a reason."

"The reason was that he much feared his mother would rise up and forbid it," said Jane. "Truth's truth, Mr. Huxam, and I won't begin my married life with a lie, even if we have to live in a gutter. He felt cruel sure that Mrs. Huxam wouldn't like him marrying, though he never said she wouldn't like me myself. He felt sure that you would like me, because you had a very high

opinion of my late grandfather, Mr. Matthew Catt, and of the Catts in general; but he weren't going to take any risks, and being a man of tender mind, he knew it would hurt him dreadfully if his mother was to put down her foot against the match. And he felt, rather than face such a sad thing as that, and cause his mother pain, and suffer a lot himself, and perhaps even be drove to break it off, which would have pretty well killed me—in a word, Mr. Huxam, he felt 'discretion was the better part of valour.' That was his own wise words. And so we were married quite lawful and regular in a church, and he's got the lines. And if love can make him a success, he'll be one in future. He's a wonderful man really."

Jeremy returned.

"Tom Bonus will bring along our two boxes," he said. "It's very comforting to see faces you know round about you again, and I hope I shan't be called to leave Brent no more. My next job will be tackled with all the determination of a married man, dad; and, if it suits me, I shouldn't wonder if I surprised you."

Mr. Huxam began to collect his shattered wits.

"I don't want no more surprises," he answered. "We'll walk round the long way, and just let me get law and order into the situation afore we go home. I blame you a very great deal; but that's neither here nor there. My rule is to face facts and never waste time thinking how much nicer it would be if they was different. You're married—that's the first thing to grasp—and the second and more important is this that you are now going before your mother, wife in hand, and your mother don't know what you've done."

"We've come home properly worked up to face the music," said Jeremy. "United we stand, dad. We feel that very much indeed; and divided we should have fallen without a doubt. But well we know that there's nothing like the plain, unvarnished truth and——"

"Dry up and listen to me," replied his father. "As

nought else will serve but the truth in a case like this, it ain't particular wonderful to hear you say the truth have got to come out. But why you hid the truth, you know; and Jane's told me, so I know also. That's your weak nature, and I'm not troubling myself about you, nor yet this woman, who may very like be too good for you."

"Far from it, Mr. Huxam," said the young wife. "With all his faults, Jeremy's a lot better than me."

"Don't eat humble pie, Jane," said her husband. "That's a thing that never pays with mother. She hates for people to cringe."

"It's your mother and only your mother I'm thinking upon at present," continued Barlow, "and according as your mother receives this blow, so it will be. At best it must shake her to the roots, because it shows up a very dark and unexpected side of you. Cowards are always cunning, and it don't astonish me so much, because it's well in keeping with your character to do a thing behind the scenes you wouldn't dare in the open; but his mother have always had a soft corner for him, Jane—the only soft corner she ever allowed herself for anybody—except her Maker—and so this is going to be an eye-opener for her. And an eye-opener, where the heart is set, always happens to be the most painful sort."

"You're speaking without allowing for the great powers of my wife, dad," murmured Jeremy.

"I am," admitted Mr. Huxam, "because I don't know anything about the great powers of your wife; but I know the great powers of mine, and her way of looking at everything; and her principles and her trust in even Higher Powers than her own."

"Our marriage was made in Heaven, if ever there was one, I'm sure," ventured Jane.

"It may, or may not have been. But Heaven never meant for you to keep it hid from Jeremy's parents; and if it was made in Heaven, Mrs. Huxam would have been

the last to try and prevent it," answered Barlow. "The point for the minute is to break it to her, and I'm inclined to think I can do that a lot better than my son."

"Devil doubt it!" said Jeremy with great relief. "It's like your sense to see that, father. I quite agree. I quite agree. Supposing Jane and I go for a nice walk and come back home to tea?"

"Do Mrs. Parsons know?" asked Mr. Huxam.

"There again," answered Jeremy. "We didn't tell her. Not but well we know she'll be glad."

"She'll be proud," promised Jane. "It will be the proudest day of her life. She never hoped anything like Jeremy for me, Mr. Huxam. She knew there were a good few after me, but never thought of your son."

Mrs. Milly Parsons now dwelt in a cottage by Lydia Bridge, where the river took a great leap before descending into the meadows and woods of Brent. Thankfully Jeremy postponed the supreme moment of the day, left his father to break the news, implored him to do so in a friendly spirit and wandered off with his wife up the valley beside the river.

Then Barlow Huxam returned to his shop, called Judith from behind the counter for a moment and prepared to tell her what had happened.

"At my wish, Judy, our son has gone up over and won't be back till tea-time," he began, but Mrs. Huxam stopped him.

"Who is she?" asked Jeremy's mother quite quietly.

Again Barlow felt the solid earth slipping.

"You know?" he asked.

"Two boxes have come, and Bonus brought them," she answered. "I told him only one was Jeremy's, and he said very like, but that the other belonged to his wife."

"It's true. Wonders never cease in our family—well ordered though it may be. The world's to the young, and a proper mess they seem likely to make of it. You always

thought that marriage would save or settle Jeremy, and we can only pray that it will save him."

Mrs. Huxam was pale. She mopped her face quietly with a white handkerchief and remained silent.

"Don't you take on," he begged. "Don't let it shake you."

"Does anything shake me?" she asked. "What right should I have to stand with the Chosen Few, Barlow Huxam, if anything shook me? It's the Lord's will and that's enough."

"There!" he said, "faltering creature that I am, I never thought of that."

"No—nor yet Jeremy. But a man don't marry a woman by chance. It had to be, and it is. And who is she?"

"Jane Parsons—child of Milly Parsons by Lydia Bridge, who was daughter of the late Matthew Catt of Bullstone Farm. The Lord's doing and marvellous in our eyes, Judy."

"Things done behind our backs are often marvellous in our eyes, when we first see them," she answered. "I shall take this as I take everything else, Barlow, knowing where it comes from."

"It may be a blessing in disguise. She's a fine girl and will have her mother's little bit of money. Farmer Catt left just in sight of four figures. They'll be here to tea. They're full of resolutions."

CHAPTER II

AT RED HOUSE

JEREMY and his wife went to dinner at Red House a week after their return home. His marriage afforded mild entertainment to those who knew him. Some felt sanguine, others prophesied confusion and failure on a larger scale than he had yet achieved.

As they walked through a June morning, Jeremy explained to Jane that Jacob Bullstone was a man of affairs and might be expected to help them.

"Not so much for my sake as Margery's," he admitted; "but he's a wonderful husband to her, and she will have been at him already I expect. My sister's delighted that I'm married, and no doubt will feel that now is the time for my real friends to come forward."

Jane, also of a sanguine temperament, echoed his hopes. She loved him so much that it seemed hard to suppose the world would deny such a man his opportunity.

As they neared Red House, they overtook an ancient man walking slowly before them.

"It's William Marydrew," said Jane. "He was often up over at Bullstone when Grandfather Catt lived. A proper old figure of fun."

They saluted Billy, who walked with a stick and smoked a clay pipe. He was bent and travelled slowly. He had snow-white whiskers, which met under his chin, and a red, crinkled face with a cheerful expression. His eyes were small and he blinked and saw badly, for they were weak. Jane told him that she was married, and he said

he had heard about it, but other matters had caused the fact to slip his memory.

"May you be a happy pair and find life go very suent," he hoped.

Billy seemed, however, not so cheerful as of old.

"I trust you find yourself well," said Jane.

"Very well indeed, my dear," he answered. "If I be allowed to go my own pace and eat my own food, I don't feel a pang. Threatened blindness be my only cloud so far as the body is concerned. By ninety I shall be so blind as a mole. And yet what odds? Even so, I shall have had the use of my eyes for a quarter of a century more than most folk."

"You'm a thought downcast, Mr. Marydrew," ventured Jane. "I always remember you as a great laughter-maker in my grandfather's time."

"So I was then, and so I will be again," he promised. "I'm a funny old blid—for why? I never look back and be naturally of a hopeful turn of mind. But just now, owing to a very fatal accident, I'm under the weather for the moment."

"If there's anything in the world I could do," said Jeremy.

"No, my dear, there's nothing you can do. You see I've just closed the eyes of my only daughter. Mercy Marydrew's gone to her reward."

"Good Lord, your famous daughter dead!" exclaimed Jane.

"Died at the Cottage Hospital at half after ten," answered the old man. "And being myself mortal, I'm under a cloud for the minute. Not for her—not for her. There never was such a huckster in these parts as Mercy and never a better saleswoman."

"She had a great renown in Plymouth market," declared Jane.

"Yes—a renowned woman for a spinster. And she counted to work for another five years and then retire.

But there comed a growth—one of they cursed things that creeps into the flesh unbeknownst. You feel all right for a bit, but death's burrowing in your vitals all the time; and then you be cut down and wither away."

"I hope she didn't suffer much," said Jeremy.

"I hope she didn't," answered Mr. Marydrew. "I know she's left me her savings, God bless her; but I'd a lot sooner she'd been at my death-bed, than I'd been at hers."

"You'll meet again before so very long," murmured Jane.

"A cheering thought," admitted the old man. "Yes, we shall come together in a few years, though I dare say that good woman's bit of money will keep me here longer than you might suppose. She knew very well I wouldn't waste it. I'm sorry for the parish that she's gone. The farms will look in vain for a huckster like her. The honestest woman ever I knew, after her mother."

"A very great loss indeed," said Jeremy.

"Yes, so it is then. You can judge a dead person pretty much by the hole they make when they drop out. Some don't make no hole—I shan't, and I dare say you won't; but others was so useful to the neighbours and such a tower of strength, that when they go, you most wonder how things will be without 'em."

"There's Owley Cot will be empty for one thing," said Jane.

"Yes, it will; and if bricks and mortar could be sorry for themselves, I dare say her house would grieve."

They had come to a cottage near Shipley Bridge, the home of Mr. Marydrew.

"The funeral moves on Monday at noon," he said, "and there will be a pretty good rally of neighbours I expect."

"Everybody of any account will go," declared Jeremy. "She was a most popular woman."

"Them that respect themselves did ought to go," answered Billy, "let alone them that respected her. And if you're going to Red House, break the news and tell Jacob

I'll be pleased to hear his sympathy. I'm very old for a blow like this, and 'tis no good pretending I don't feel cruel cast down, because I do."

"And it will get worse, when you grasp it," foretold Jane. "I know it will."

"It's got to get worse afore it gets better," admitted Billy. "I'm quite prepared to face that. And tell Jacob to look me up in my misfortune if you please. He won't need to be told twice."

They left him, entered a grassy plateau beside the river, where towered ruins of old clay works, and so proceeded toward Red House.

They talked concerning Mr. Marydrew's loss and the familiar figure of his busy daughter. Then they noticed a boy fishing in the river. He was a sturdy, hatless youngster clad in patched, grey tweeds, with a mourning band on his left arm.

"That's John Henry," said Jeremy, "Margery's eldest."

"What's he got a mourning band on for?" asked Jane, and he explained that Jacob's mother had died during the previous winter.

They passed into the shadowy stillness of the fir wood and soon emerged before Red House. The contours of the place were unchanged, save for that gradual growth of tree and shrub which escapes the human eye; but in certain particulars there were alterations; the old severity of outline was gone; there was less tidiness and more beauty, for there had come children and flowers. Margery loved flowers and the plantings of her first wedded year, greatly prospering, now climbed Red House to its roof and increased on the river banks. Where roses and bright blossoms could grow, she had planted them; and they had passed over the river also and mantled the borders. They intruded into the vegetable patches and so greatly increased that Jacob sometimes grumbled and uprooted. Where Margery might set a climbing rose, a tiger lily, a lupin or

a larkspur, she had done so. There were clumps of chrysanthemums for autumn, and the grass and river sides were sowed with daffodil and crocus for the spring. This colour flashed in stars and sprays upon the hedges and by the paths, while in the little garden, once a plat of grass and no more, now opened many flower beds that broke the green. Even to the kennels she had gone and roses now hid many of the iron bars. She declared that her passion was for children, flowers and company; and of these she lacked not the children, or the bloom.

Margery, in a white gown and a dark blue sunbonnet, met her brother and his wife and kissed them both. Now she was thirty-four and a woman of fine presence, yet slight as in her girlhood and delicately fashioned. She was healthy, but not physically strong. Her eyes told no secrets but gazed untroubled at the world. None wholly enjoyed her confidence and she spoke ever of her good fortune, never concerning any thorn that might be concealed. Thus she was believed to be a woman wholly happy, and indeed enjoyed her share of happiness. The delight of a secret had lately lent sauce to existence; for she, and she alone, was in Jeremy's confidence and had heard of his betrothal and marriage.

She greeted them with kindly laughter, chid them for a brainless couple and hoped that her brother would at last find work worthy of a married man and within his power to accomplish.

Jeremy felt no doubt of it. He prattled to Avis and Auna, his little nieces, while Margery turned her attention to Jane.

"I shall always care a lot for you," she said frankly, "first for your husband's sake, then for a reason you forget, but I do not. I mind you as a little one fifteen years ago, when my husband made holiday before I was married, and took me to Bullstone Farm. That was a great day in my life—my first treat with Jacob."

"I remember you very well," answered Jane. "I've

told Jeremy I've never forgot you, and I had a bit of your wedding-cake, that mother brought home from the Huxams."

"And what about your wedding-cake?"

"We didn't have anything like that. Jeremy was so properly anxious to get the deed done that we rushed it. Mrs. Huxam's forgiven us, because she says we were in Higher Hands, and that if the Lord hadn't wanted it to happen, it wouldn't have; but my mother feels it was a good bit of a slight to keep it dark, and thinks Jeremy was undutiful and didn't pay me enough respect. But what does it all matter?"

"Not a bit," declared Jeremy's sister. "He's as good as gold, though a bit faint-hearted. You'll have to make him take himself more serious, Jane."

John Henry interrupted them. He returned with two small trout, which his mother faithfully promised to eat; and then came Peter from the kennels.

"They are praying for the holidays to come," said Margery. "My boys both hate their books you must know; and Jacob don't care over-much, because they're both so clear in their minds what they're wishful to be."

"That's a great thing," said Jane.

"It is then."

Peter resembled his father, while John Henry was said to be like his grandfather Bullstone. Both, so Jacob held, were true Bullstones—strong, self-reliant and determined. They grew fast, worked harder at home than at school, and longed for the time when they might begin life seriously—the elder on the land, the younger at his father's business.

"Peter's got the love of dogs in him on both sides," explained Peter's mother, "for I always did love the creatures, and so does Jacob; and John Henry loves farming."

Her husband, for whom they waited, appeared, and calling Jeremy, who strolled in the garden with his nieces, they went in to dinner.

Jacob Bullstone had grown stouter, but he was very

active still and did the work of a man of fifty without sparing himself. His dark hair began to grizzle and his face showed lines, but he preserved his health, lived in the old way and as yet indulged none of the temptations of middle life.

He chaffed Jeremy, but was in an amiable mood.

"You haven't changed him yet I see," he said to Jane, while he sharpened a knife and prepared to carve a round of beef.

"I had to bring Auna and Avis a present of course," declared Jeremy. "They believe in their uncle, they do; and you've got to encourage people who believe in you."

The girls had shown their father two little brooches.

"Well, we shall see rare sights now no doubt," said Jacob. "With Jane here to guide the helm, you'll soon astonish us. How did your mother-in-law welcome you, Jane?"

"Like the wonderful Christian she is," answered Jeremy's wife. "Kissed me on the forehead and said a few Bible words."

For a considerable time Jeremy and Jane had to listen to the affairs of their prosperous relations. They were good listeners and praised all they heard. Of the children only Avis talked. She was a bold, handsome girl full of self-confidence. Then Margery bade her sons declare their ambitions and Jacob tried to make Auna talk, but she was very shy. She sat by her father, a thin, dark maiden, with beautiful eyes and delicate little hands. Jacob devoted a good deal of his time to her and tempted her to eat. They whispered together sometimes. Margery watched them under her lids, smiling. She knew that Auna was dearer to her husband than the other three children put together, and, in secret to her alone, he did not deny it.

"She's you again," he would say.

But Margery was not jealous for the boys. Them she set highest, and of them John Henry came first.

When the meal was done, the children departed and

Jacob rambled on concerning them until Margery brought up the subject of her brother.

"Now let's talk 'about these young people," she said. "For though you're thirty, Jeremy, you're terrible young still—hardly wife-old, I should have reckoned."

"I'm young in heart and old in experience," vowed Jeremy. "I've got to a pitch when I know very well what I can't do, and am set on finding something I can."

"I was talking to Adam Winter about you but yesterday," continued Margery. "He's a man in a small way, but sensible and——"

Jacob interrupted her.

"Sensible no doubt. All your friends are sensible I'm sure; but your brother's come to hear me I believe."

Margery did not answer. Indeed she did not speak again; but she smiled to herself and Jacob also smiled. It was an unreal smile on both faces.

"I'm not going to do anything on the land," explained Jeremy. "I proved pretty clearly five years ago that I wasn't cut out for the land."

Jacob chaffed him again.

"Lord knows what you are cut out for—excepting a failure," he said.

"Granted," answered Jeremy; "but that was when I went into life single-handed. Lots of chaps are failures before they are married; then, afterwards, they shine out and surprise everybody."

"I've had you in mind. Old Miss Marydrew is going home pretty fast and she'll leave a gap. I don't say you can fill it, and single-handed you certainly could not; but along with Jane you might."

Jeremy looked at Jane.

"If I hadn't forgot!" he said. "We met Billy Marydrew back-along, outside his house, and he was just come from his daughter. She's dead, and he was very wisht about it."

"Dead!" said Margery. "Poor Mercy gone!"

"Yes, and William wanted it to be told here, and hoped that Mr. Bullstone would step over," added Jane.

"You ought to have told me before," declared Jacob. "That man is a dear old friend of mine. The sanest, biggest-hearted soul that ever I knew, and much to me ever since I was a child. He'll think I'm hanging back, just because you bird-witted people forgot to tell me."

He rose, but spoke again before he departed.

"Mercy Marydrew was a huckster. She went round in her little cart and collected butter, eggs and poultry from the farms for Plymouth market. And to market she went with her baskets, every Friday of her life for thirty years. Now think of it, Jeremy. How if you did her job round about, and Jane went to market."

"To drive about in the open air! The dream of my life!" said Jeremy.

"You always say it's the dream of your life, when a new opening is found for you," laughed his sister.

"Think of it seriously," urged Jacob. "This also means that Owley Cot, my little house by Owley Farm, is on my hands, and there you'll be in the heart of your job with the farms all around you. But it's up to Jane more than you. Whether she'll make a good market-woman is the question. Now I must be gone for an hour and see that poor chap. This will hit him harder than he thinks for. I'll be back before you leave."

"I can't find words to thank you," declared Jeremy, "but I'll show it in deeds, Jacob. To have my own trap and drive about in the open among my neighbours! It's almost too good to be true."

They turned to Margery and praised her husband when he was gone.

"It's wonderful how life opens out after you're married," said Jane.

"It does," admitted Margery. "It opens out, as you say, Jane, and shows you all sorts of things you never dreamed. And it also shows how every little bit of happi-

ness carries its own worm in the bud. However, you'll find that out for yourself. You know Owley Cot well enough of course?"

"Loved it ever since I was a child," answered Jane. "Mr. Elvin's old mother lived there; and when she died, a game-keeper and his wife was there for a bit; then Miss Marydrew rented it from your husband."

"And nobody ever had a better tenant. She did her part and Jacob did his, and I did mine, which was to plant a lot of roses and nice flowers in the garden. You'll find it perfect, for she had a trick to make everything about her look flame new all the time. A very clever woman and Joe Elvin will miss her, for she was one of the hopeful ones, like her old father, and cheered the man up. He's a grizzler—born so, yet no call to be. He's had his share of luck and Jacob says he's pretty snug, but his health's bad."

"I remember Owley Cot," declared Jeremy. "I used to go up to Owley, to kill rats with my ferret when I was a boy, and I was very friendly with Joe's son, Robert."

"Robert's going to make a better man than Joe," said Margery. "A very nice boy, and seeing his father's so melancholy, he's fought shy of it, and takes a bright view. Jacob says he'll be a tip-top farmer presently."

"Joe used to be kind to me, because he respected mother such a lot—and father," declared Jeremy.

"He's kind to everybody in his mournful way," answered Margery; "but he'd always sooner go to a funeral than a wedding, and when he opens the paper of a morning, so Robert tells me, he always says, 'And who are the lucky ones?' Then you find he's reading the deaths. Yet nobody would hate dying more than him."

Jeremy was full of his prospects. He always expatiated over any new scheme and saw manifold possibilities.

"Of course I'm the last to build castles in the air, or anything like that," he declared, "but, all the same, if only Jacob can lend a hand here with the house and a trap and

a horse, he certainly won't regret it. An energetic man like me, with a good horse, should be able to do far greater rounds than poor Miss Marydrew, and I'd work up a connection among the farms for miles and miles round. Then, luckily Jane is used to a shop, and in the market she would do wonders and get all Miss Marydrew's old custom with a lot added. In course of time—probably a very short time—I should pay Jacob's kindness back with large interest, you may be certain. In fact the idea hasn't a weak spot that I can see."

"There's got to be a new huckster for certain," said Jane. "It's not man's work as a rule; but I've known men to do it for their wives."

"It's man's work the way I shall do it," promised Jeremy. "And I shouldn't wonder if I couldn't beat up a good few customers in Plymouth myself when they hear of this. I made a lot of nice friends there."

"Uncle Lawrence might come to you," suggested Margery. She referred to her mother's brother, Mr. Lawrence Pulleyblank, an owner of fishing trawlers and a man after his sister's own heart.

Jeremy's face fell.

"I'm sorry to say it, but Uncle Lawrence doesn't like me very much. You see he got me that last billet, that failed through no fault of mine; and after he found I was giving up and coming home, he said some strong things. But you are all the world to Uncle Lawrence, Margery, and when he hears of this new and much more important step I'm taking, no doubt, if you dropped a word, he'd buy his butter and eggs and so on off me and Jane."

"I'm sorry you fell out with him," said Margery.

"I didn't—I didn't," answered her brother. "I don't fall out with anybody. It was his natural disappointment that I didn't shine in the artificial manure works. He'll always say it was because I was weak and couldn't stand the smells. He hasn't got a nose himself, else he wouldn't live on the Barbican. But I respect him very much and I

hope he'll live to respect me. He's looking forward to your visit as usual."

Lawrence Pulleyblank, an old bachelor, regarded Margery as his special joy. She visited him every year, and always took a child with her.

"It's the turn of Peter," she said, "and we go down in August."

"To think of Owley Cot!" murmured Jane. "Too good to be true in my opinion. Its little windows catch the morning light, and the chimney's covered with ivy. Great fir trees with red stems grow over it and there's an upping-stock for horsemen outside the gate."

"You won't know it for roses now," answered Margery. "Poor dear Mercy Marydrew—her heart used to sink when I came along with some new flowers dug up from here. She was all for tidiness, and I do think flowers gave her more pain than pleasure."

"I like them and I'll tend them well," promised Jane.

Her sister-in-law, regarding her with side glances, perceived that she was possessed of childish charm. She was a pleading sort of girl—just the type sure to win Jeremy's affections.

"My own impression is that it's going to mean big money from the first," said the future huckster. "I'm itching to be at it; and I'm very hopeful it may be possible to secure some of Miss Marydew's furniture, so we can go into Owley Cot as soon as Jacob likes. Father would help there."

"And we shan't fear to rough it neither," continued Jane. "We've said to each other, scores of times, that we don't mind how hard life is, so we share it together."

"Not hard for you, however," promised Jeremy. "I'm the one to bear the battle and come between you and everything. That's what I'm here for."

Then they went to look at the kennels.

The family reassembled at tea, and Jacob, who had spent

an hour with Mr. Marydrew, declared that he was bearing up exceedingly well.

"Too sensible to lose his balance under any trouble," he said.

Bullstone found that Jeremy had already undertaken the new work in spirit and was actually thriving at it, saving money and repaying his debts.

"Trust me," he said, "and be sure of this, that I shall return good measure well pressed down, Jacob. This is the chance of a lifetime, and something tells me my foot is now firm on the ladder."

They parted presently, and while Auna and Avis accompanied them for a mile on their return journey to Brent, Margery thanked her husband.

"It's like you; I'm sure I'm deeply obliged; and father and mother will feel as grateful as I do," she said rather formally.

Jacob laughed.

"For you and yours I do it. But don't be too hopeful. Jeremy isn't built to help on the world—only to be helped on by it."

"Perhaps now he's married——"

"Yes, yes, he'll try valiantly—a most well-meaning chap—but you can't ask putty to take the place of lead. I'll push him and do what I may; and so will you. If manners could make him, he'd be all right; but he's like your rose-bushes—wants a lot of tying up and supporting."

CHAPTER III

BARTON GILL UNDER NOTICE

THE mind of Barton Gill was exercised, for he had heard painful news and suddenly learned the unsuspected opinion of another man concerning him. He felt shocked and cast down, having never guessed that Jacob Bullstone contemplated the possibility which now confronted Mr. Gill as a fact.

Barton was sixty-eight and, in his own opinion, as active and apprehensive as ever. Looking back he perceived that he had actually outgrown some weaknesses of middle age; while with respect to his knowledge of dogs, no man could deny that it embraced everything of importance.

Returning from Brent, the kennel-man fell in with Adam Winter and revealed his troubles.

"Hast heard the black news, Adam?" he began. "But of course you have not. It only burst upon me yesterday."

"Can it be bettered, or is it one of they fatal things beyond repair?" asked Winter.

It was his solid custom on all occasions to help if harm might be averted, but not to fret unduly at evil accomplished.

"Whether it's going to be fatal remains to be seen; but I don't feel an ounce of hope," said Gill. "In a word—Jacob Bullstone. You know his way. He'll store his thoughts, and smile, and hide what's moving in his head from every eye but his Maker's; and then, when the deed is ripe, he'll do it. And so half his actions come upon people as a great surprise, because they never get a wink of what was leading up to 'em."

"He's always got his reasons, however," argued Adam.

"He may have, or he may not. And it's all one, anyhow, since he never feels called to give 'em. But in my case there ain't a shadow of reason. He's built up a very wrong and mistaken picture of me. He's watched me in secret, which ain't a manly thing to do, and now, like a thunder planet, he's fallen upon me and given me the sack!"

"My stars! You going?"

"Under notice; but never any warning in the rightful sense of the word," explained Barton Gill. "I've been doing my work in season and out at Red House for half a century, and putting the dogs before everything but God Almighty, and helping to make 'em the world-famous creatures they be. And full of zeal for the family, and pouring my knowledge into young Peter. And now to be flung out."

"Why for, Barton?"

"Well may you ax that. For no reason on earth but because I'm too old! And only sixty-eight by this hand, and I wish I may die if a year more."

Adam was cautious. He felt very little doubt that Jacob Bullstone knew his own business best. They had been neighbours for fifteen years and, so far as Winter knew, Jacob regarded him as a good neighbour. They had never quarrelled and not often differed. Indeed they met but seldom and Adam saw Margery Bullstone far oftener than her husband. He had been good to her children and regarded himself as an old friend of the family; but his relations with Bullstone were not intimate.

"What you say about Bullstone's character is very interesting, Barton," he replied. "There are some men that do things on a sudden and hide the reasons. But, if you look, you'll often find, after your surprise dies down, that there's nothing much to be surprised about. I'm sorry if you wanted to stop on. Perhaps, if you was to be content to sing second to a younger man and just milk the goats and potter about for smaller money, he'd be content."

"You say that? Why, that's what he offered me!"

"Not the sack then? You told me you were flung out."

Gill shook his head impatiently.

"You don't know my character seemingly, though you ought to by now. But Bullstone does know it, and well he knows I'd not bide under a younger kennel-keeper. I stop as head man, else I don't stop. And this I say, that to see your faithful life's work forgot is a sad sight. He did ought at least to be decent and let me die in harness, before he talks of changes and new-fangled notions. What the hell more do he want than first prizes again and again, and four awards in the last ten years for the best dog in the show?"

"Youth will be served," said Winter. "I see it more and more. I'm forty-six and not done with yet; but it's no good pretending the younger men don't know more than us. They've got what we can give them, because they're always welcome to our knowledge; but they've got much more than that, along of education, and I'll bet there's scores of men ten and fifteen years younger than me, who know more about the latest in farming; and, of course, there's scores know more than you about the latest in dogs."

"You're a very poor-spirited creature to say so then, and I don't think none the better of you for it," replied Gill warmly. "I ban't one to throw up the sponge before youth, I promise you. I understand the wilful ways of youth a darned sight too well. Hot-headed toads—always dashing at things, to show off their fancied cleverness, and then coming to us, with their tails between their legs, to make good their mistakes. You might just so soon say a puppy's wiser than his sire, than tell me the youths know more than us."

"It's nature," argued Winter. "When we stand still, the younger ones have got to pass us by. And, to the seeing eye, that's the first thing middle age marks—that the young men go past. We think we be trudging along so

quick as ever; but we are not. And as for your life's work, you've done your duty we all know and done it very well. You was born to work and you've worked honest and helped on the world of dogs in your time; but nothing stands still and dogs will improve beyond your knowledge no doubt. So I should be dignified about it and go. Nought lasts, and youth's the flood that's always making to drown all."

Barton Gill considered these sentiments, but did not approve of them.

"I had it in mind to ax you to put in a word for me," he answered; "but I see I can't."

"Not very well, Barton. I don't know enough about it, and nobody has a right to come between master and man."

"Everybody's got a right to throw light on another's darkness. Bullstone's wrong. He might so soon give his right hand notice as me. He's got to take me as an accepted law of nature, and he's worked himself into a silly fancy that a younger man would be what I am, and even more. But it's ignorance; and if I took him at his word and went, he'd be calling out for me on his knees in a week."

"Then you ought to be hopeful," said Adam. "If that was to happen, you'd come back with a flourish of trumpets."

"I don't want no flourish of trumpets and I don't want to go," declared the other. "It's very ill-convenient and unchristian thing to fire me now, and I hope Bullstone will see sense before it's too late."

Adam Winter had some experience of the tyranny of old servants and perceived that the kennel-man was not going to leave Red House if he could stop there.

"What does Mrs. Bullstone say?" he asked. "She's a very clever woman."

"For a woman she is," admitted Gill; "and when she calls home what I've been to her young people, I make no doubt she'll see that a very improper thought have

come to master. But I haven't sounded her as yet and she may not have the pluck to take my side."

"What did you say to Bullstone?"

"Nothing so far. He burst it on me, as I tell you, and left me and my stomach wambling with the shock. I couldn't let down my dinner after, for the troubled mind tells upon the body instanter. I just axed him if I'd heard aright, and he said I had; and since then I've been turning it over."

They had reached the gate of Shipley Farm on the east bank of Auna, and Adam stood a moment before entering.

"Well, I dare say it will straighten out. Look all round it. You've only got yourself to think of; and if you was to retire, you'd enjoy a restful time, and the respect due to you, and not be sorry to find yourself idle with your work well done."

"I'm not going," answered Barton. "One word's as good as a thousand, and unless the man uses force, I don't go. I've set the age of seventy-five for retirement, and I don't break my word to myself for fifty Bullstones."

In this determined mood he crossed the bridge and proceeded sulkily homeward. A thought struck him and he turned and shouted it back to Adam.

"A man's home is his home, ain't it? And who the devil's going to turn me out of my home?"

Adam did not answer, but laughed to himself. He was still laughing when he entered his kitchen, where his aunt, Amelia Winter, and his brother, Samuel, had just begun their tea.

"I didn't expect you back so soon, my dear," he said to the old woman.

"And I didn't expect to be home so soon," she answered, "and, what's more, I came too soon for my peace, for if I hadn't gone up Church Lane when I did, I shouldn't have seen a very sad sight."

Amelia had worn well. She was upright and stout and strong—the youngest of the party, as Adam always de-

clared. The men resembled each other. Samuel was but a few years older than his brother and Adam stood to him for divinity. He echoed his opinions and bestowed upon him absolute trust. Nothing his younger brother could do was wrong. Sammy's mental eccentricities were considered quite harmless and they had seldom as yet made him a danger to the community. If he ever displayed a spark of passion, it was at any adverse criticism of Adam, and this weakness on his part—once actually manifested, when he fell tooth and nail upon another labourer for laughing at his brother over some trifle—was now respected. In person Samuel appeared a larger edition of Adam, but of gaunt expression and already grey. He was very strong and laboured like a horse. Work kept his mind sweet.

"And what might you have seen to shock you, Aunt?" asked the master of Shipley.

"A sorry sight," she answered. "You mind poor Miss Marydrew's famous hat with the red squirrel's tail? It was a well-known feature—a proper landmark round about; and to-day I've seen it on another woman's head, and you might have knocked me down with a feather. That any female could have the front to flaunt that well-known trophy! And such a female! Sarah Saunders if you please. Properly indecent I call it."

"Her sale fetched very good prices," said Adam. "Old William kept a few of the best things for his house; but they say he's cleared something better than sixty pounds by it."

"He oughtn't to have sold her clothes, and I've told him so," answered Amelia. "Clothes are sacred to the wearer in my opinion, and I'd so soon have seen Mercy's ghost as her hat on that wicked head. It won't bring no luck to anybody concerned."

Adam told how Barton Gill was under notice, and his aunt thought it a hard thing. Samuel waited to hear his brother's opinion, and echoed it.

“Gill’s worn out and did ought to make room for a younger man,” he said.

He spoke very slowly in a very deep voice.

“Did Mrs. Kingwell’s cow come to ‘Turk’?” asked Adam.

“She came,” answered his brother.

Then the men went out to their evening labours.

No great prosperity marked the farm, but Adam was not ambitious and his future hopes only extended to his brother. He desired to see Samuel safely through life and never at the mercy of unfriendly or indifferent hands. His own needs were of the simplest. He had abandoned any wish to wed, or raise up a family. He was content and his life went uneventfully forward, brightened by various friendships. He was well liked but not well known. To more full-blooded and energetic men he seemed shadowy; yet none ever heard him say a foolish thing. His neighbours knew him for a capable farmer, but they wondered why he stopped on year after year at a place which offered such small opportunity for enterprise as Shipley. Others, however, explained this seclusion as accepted on Samuel’s account. Samuel was happier in loneliness.

CHAPTER IV

ON SHIPLEY BRIDGE

THE subconscious work of grievances and the secret attrition of their fret are dangerous. Margery Bullstone harboured such an ill, and it had wrought inevitable modification of character, for sense of personal wrong, if indulged, must mar quality. She was barely conscious of this buffet, and when she thought upon her life, assured herself that its compensations and disillusionings were fairly balanced, for she loved her husband and tried to keep his fine characteristics uppermost in her mind; but she liked him less than of old and her grievance appeared in this: that he hindered her and came between her and many innocent pleasures which would have made her life fuller and happier. She did not understand Jacob save in flashes, and was dimly aware of perils in his nature and chambers, hidden in his heart, which held danger. He told her often that he held no secrets from her, and perhaps he believed it. Regarding temporal matters—his success or failure, his money, his possessions, his plans—it was emphatically true. He liked her to know how he stood, to share his hopes, to sympathise in his disappointments. But this was not all, and Margery knew that in the far deeper secrets of character and conviction, she had not entered the depth of her husband's mind and never would. He was a warm-hearted man and yet, under the warmth, flowed currents hidden from every eye. Sometimes, more by accident than intention, she had dipped for a moment into these currents, been chilled and found herself glad to ascend into the temperate region of

their usual communion. She knew he was jealous, yet he seldom said a word to prove it. But she understood him well enough to read his silences and they were unspeakably pregnant. They would sometimes last for several days and frighten her. She had known bitter weeks when Jacob addressed no living thing but the dogs. Then the darkness would drift off and his steadfast and not uncheerful self shine out. Sometimes she was able to discover a reason for such eclipse; sometimes, puzzle as she might, no cause occurred to her mind. If she approached him, expressed grief for his tribulation and prayed to share it, he would put her off. Then she felt the cause, if not the fault, was in herself.

"If you don't know the reason, then no doubt there's no reason," was a cryptic answer he often made, and it left her dumb. She was conscious of a strange sense that somebody beside her husband dwelt unseen at Red House—somebody who watched and noted, but made no comment. The unseen expressed neither pleasure nor displeasure, but concentrated upon her and chronicled her actions and opinions. Jacob seemed to be two personalities, the one obvious, trustworthy, affectionate, the other inscrutable, attentive, vigilant. If one Jacob praised her and seemed to come closer, so that she felt happy, then arose the consciousness of the other Jacob, concerning whom she knew so little, and whose attitude to herself she could not feel was friendly. Had she been able to put a name to it, or analyse her husband's second self, she might have felt easier in some directions; but as yet she had failed to understand. Nor could anybody help her to do so. Perhaps Judith Huxam came nearest to explaining the obscurity. But she refused to give it a name, though her suspicion found vent in cautions to Margery.

Jacob was not secretive in many things, and a habit of his, quite familiar to his wife, might have helped towards elucidation had she been of a synthetic bent. He would sometimes himself harbour grievances for days and then

plump out with them. They were generally of a trivial appearance in Margery's eyes, and she often wondered at the difference between the things that annoyed a woman and perturbed a man. He was obstinate and had his own way as a matter of course. She never opposed him, and where alternatives of action presented themselves, Jacob decided; but some things happened that she felt were a permanent bruise to him. They grew out of life and struck the man in his tenderest part. None was responsible for them and they rose from material as subtle and intangible as heredity and character. Margery granted that they were very real facts and would have altered them for her husband's sake had it been possible to do so; but to alter them was not possible, for they rooted in the souls of the four children now swiftly growing up at Red House.

Jacob was a good father, and coming to paternity when already advanced in manhood, he had devoted more personal time and attention to his children, their nurture and formation of character, than a younger parent might have done. From the first Margery perceived that the upbringing of her brood would lie in the will of their father; and since she had cared for him better and glorified him more during the years when they were born than now, she had not differed from his opinions, even when sometimes prompted from her parents' home to do so. But chance, as though conscious of Jacob's jealousy and his overmastering desire to dominate by love of his children and his wife, had flouted this passion and denied him love.

At first the case centred with Margery herself, and while his boys and girls were little children, he had almost resented the abundant worship they bestowed upon her rather than him; but now the situation had developed, though they were still too young to hide their predilections. Nor did they turn to their father, as he expected the boys at least to do. They had declared frank affection where least he expected it. Their mother was indeed first, and then came in their regard not Jacob, but their grand-

parents; and he found to his surprise that the Huxams attracted his sons and eldest daughter. It puzzled him, even angered him; but he rarely exhibited his secret annoyance and never to any but Margery.

He was scornful to her occasionally and she admitted, or professed, a kindred astonishment. Indeed she did not know why the boys had not naturally turned to their father, since there existed no reason in his treatment of them to lessen natural affection. He was kind and generous. He supported their youthful hopes and ambitions; he went further in that direction than Margery herself; for she had desired higher education for John Henry and Peter, while their father, to her disappointment, held it worthless, seeing the nature of their hopes and abilities. In a year or two both would be free to leave the secondary school at which they studied, and Jacob held that his eldest son must then take up practical farming under experienced tuition, while Peter was to join a veterinary surgeon for a time, then come back to Red House and the Irish terriers. His decisions troubled Margery and seemed, in her mind, a slight to her sons. For Jacob had been himself well educated and knew the value of learning.

Thus husband and wife developed points of difference at this stage of their united lives, though they lived placidly on the surface and were exemplars of what marriage should be in the eyes of their neighbours. The invisible friction was concealed and all ran smoothly in general opinion.

Jacob Bullstone was exacting in trifles, and Margery, while she had waived certain pleasures that meant much to her in her early married days, always hoped to gratify them when her children were grown out of babyhood and life still beckoned. Now, in sight of their crucial years together, it was too late, and having from the first fallen in with her husband's solitary mode of life, she found it had become impossible to make him more gregarious and sociable. She loved her fellow-creatures and companionship; he preferred loneliness and found the company of his

family more than sufficient. She was ambitious to entertain a little and loved to see friends at Red House, or visit them; he cared not for hospitality and could seldom be prevailed upon either to accept it, or offer it. He was always craving for peace, while she found so much solitude to be melancholy, and often sighed for distraction. She was but thirty-four and her cheerful nature and ready sympathy made her popular. He was fifty and regarded the life he liked as more dignified and worthy of respect, excusing his hermit instinct in this manner. She loved to talk of her own and praise her children in the ears of other mothers. He deprecated this desire strongly and was morbidly sensitive about praising anything that belonged to him. At the same time he would grow silent if others took his own cue, or ventured to criticise unfavourably so much as a dog that he esteemed.

Margery concentrated on Jacob's goodness, for she knew that he was good; and at moments of depression, when life looked more grey than usual and its promise but bleak, after her children should be gone, she would remember many incidents to her husband's credit. He was very patient; he worked hard; he helped many a lame dog over a stile; he forgave wrongs; he was slow to think evil. He failed as a judge of character, which was natural in a man of his temperament; but his disappointments bred neither irony nor bitterness. She believed that he thought well of human nature, so long as it did not intrude too much upon his privacy; and she perceived that he took men at their own valuation until they proved that he was wrong to do so.

There was one golden link, and sometimes Margery confessed to her father, though not to her mother, that Auna, the baby of the family, held all together and might be called the little saviour of the situation and the central fact of the home. She was physically her mother again—more like Margery when eighteen, than Margery herself now was. She had her mother's eyes and hair, her long, slim

legs, her sudden laugh. She was an attractive child, but very shy with strangers. Yet her good nature made her fight this instinct and she pleased better in her gentle way than her more boisterous sister. Her brothers made Avis their heroine, since she could do all they could themselves and play boys' games; but Auna found this no sorrow. Her father was supreme in her affections and his own regard for her echoed her adoration.

He made no favourites openly, yet the situation could not be hidden and none was jealous of Auna, since none ever had any ground for grievance. His regard for Auna surpassed that for the others, and she loved him far better than they did. Margery would not quarrel with the fact, and Jacob explained it in a manner which left her no cause for complaint.

"It's natural that, after you, she should come first with me," he told his wife privately—indeed he often repeated the sentiment. "She's you over again—you, to every trick and turn—you, even to the tiny fraction your right eye-brow's higher than your left. In body she's you, and in mind she'll be you and me rolled into one. And she loves me more than the others all put together, just as you love me more than they do. So never wonder; and never fear I'll do less than my whole duty to every child of mine."

She never did fear that and was only sorry for him, that life had drawn this difference. With such a man it was inevitable that he would react fiercely in heart, though not out of reason. He was sensitive and knew himself not popular; and when he confessed as much and she told him that the fault was his own, since he would not court his neighbours and give them opportunity to learn his worth, he would laugh and say she was doubtless right. Yet, of the few friends that he had, he was very jealous, and when a man offered friendship and presently cooled off, as sometimes happened, by accident rather than intent, Jacob suffered secretly and puzzled himself to invent explanations, when often enough the other, pressed by a harder life than

his own, had merely let him slip a little from force of circumstances, yet still imagined him a friend.

Margery regretted her mother-in-law very heartily, for she had been a valued factor in the home and acted as anodyne of trouble on many occasions. She had taught her son's wife some precious truths concerning Jacob and made her feet firm in certain particulars. She had won the affection of her grandchildren also and she always possessed an art to satisfy Jacob himself. But she was gone and with her much that Margery had only dimly appreciated, but now missed. The wife also tended to forget a point or two that had been wiselier remembered.

Jacob broke out sometimes and said things that must have caused Margery uneasiness, had she not assumed their insignificance. What he spoke in rare fits of anger was always of the surface and unimportant to Margery, yet in another ear, if any had heard him, these speeches might have sounded ominous. Galled sometimes by thoughtlessness in his sons, or at an answer lacking in respect, he would roar harmlessly and even threaten. She had heard him say that, since Auna was the only one who cared a straw for his opinions, and valued his fatherhood in her, she should be the only one he should remember. But these things were summer thunder and lightning to his wife. Whatever his offspring might do, short of open wrong, would never influence Jacob. What was hidden she regarded, indeed, fearfully for its mystery; but that it would ever rise into injustice, folly, madness she denied. He was a man too forthright and fixed in honour and justice to wrong any fellow-creature.

And this she felt despite difference in religious opinion. She had never probed this matter, but was aware that Jacob did not share the convictions she had won in her home. He seldom went to church and seldom, indeed, discussed religion at all; but he never spoke of it without great respect and reverence before his children, though sometimes, to her, he allowed himself an expression that gave her pain.

She did not doubt, however, that under his occasional contempt for her mother's religious practices, Jacob remained a good Christian at heart. Indeed he had never questioned the verities of Christian faith, or regarded himself as anything but a religious man. But his plain dealing and scrupulous honesty sprang from heredity and was an integral part of his nature. He felt no vital prompting to religious observance in public, and his dislike of crowds kept him from church-going save on very rare occasions. Margery knew that he prayed morning and evening, and had indeed reported the fact to her mother, who distrusted Jacob in this matter. For her son-in-law himself Mrs. Huxam did not trouble; but she was much concerned in the salvation of her grandchildren.

Margery wandered down the valley one afternoon when the leaves were falling and the river making riot after a great rain in mid-moor. She always liked these autumnal phases and loved to see the glassy billows of the water roll, as they rolled when she came so near drowning in her marriage year. She proceeded to meet Jacob, who would presently return from Brent, whither he had been to despatch some dogs by train; and now she fell in with Adam Winter, riding home on a pony over Shipley Bridge. She was glad to see him, counting him among her first friends, and he welcomed her and alighted.

"Haven't met this longful time," she said and shook hands. This they never did, but for once the fancy took her and he responded.

"Leaf falling again," replied Adam, "and the autumn rain upon us. A good year, however—middling hay and corn, good roots and good grazing."

"I'm glad then. Weather's nothing to us."

"It makes a difference to your feelings," he argued. "How's things?"

"All right. 'One day followeth another,' as the Book says. And they're all mighty alike at Red House. We

don't change half so much as the river. Auna was rolling down like this when I went over the waterfall, and you got wet on my account."

"Sixteen year next month; I haven't forgotten."

"It's a long time to remember anything; but I've not forgot neither. How's my brother, Jeremy, treating you?"

Adam laughed.

"New brooms sweep clean; but he's made a great start, and don't he look a pretty picture in his trap? Up he comes, punctual as postman, every Thursday afternoon for the butter and eggs. Long may it last."

"And Jane's suited too—so far. She gets off to Plymouth market on Friday morning, and has done very clever indeed up to now."

"It was a great start in life for them, and like your husband to give it. A wonderful good thing to do. Jeremy knows his luck I hope. But there—Providence cares for the sparrows, though it over-looks the starlings in a hard winter. Jacob's a good un, Margery."

"So he is then—good as gold."

"And heavy as gold—so a man answered, when I said that very thing about Bullstone not a month ago. But I withstood him there. He's not heavy—only a self-centred man. And why not? With a home and a wife and children and a business, all packed up in the valley so snug and prosperous, why shouldn't he be self-centred? Why does he want to be anything else?"

She shook her head.

"It's narrow for a man," she answered, "and I often wish he'd go in the world more, and welcome the world at Red House for that matter."

"I'm looking at it from his point of view—not yours," replied Adam. "For the minute I was seeing his side. He's not one for neighbouring with people, and I say he don't lose much, because his business don't call for a wide knowledge of humans. He's in clover. He's got a very fine strain of dogs and the

people know it and have to give a good price for a good article. So he's not like a farmer, who must make the best he can of open markets and competition. He's all right. But I quite grant it's not just the life you'd choose, because you're a sociable creature. You like fresh faces and new voices and new opinions and new gowns; and if I'd been your husband, you'd have had most of those things anyway."

"I believe I might. You'd make a very good husband, Adam. A good husband wasted. But why? It's not too late. Why don't you take a wife? I should be glad, for it would mean another woman here, and new ideas."

"For your sake I would then," he said. "But the time's past, if it ever came. I've got a bachelor nature and plenty to think upon without a wife."

"Lookers on see most of the game. I'm sure you're a lot cleverer and more understanding than most married men."

"Not much in the way of cleverness, else I wouldn't be puzzled so oft."

"The open mind's a very good thing. I'd sooner be puzzled than always think I knew. Such a lot always think they know; and always know wrong."

"It's the point of view," he said.

"If my Jacob could look at things from outside, same as you do; and not always from inside, same as he does, then he'd see a lot clearer all round life."

"He sees clear enough what he wants to see. He don't waste his time looking at doubtful or uncertain things. What he does see, he sees; and so, on his own ground, he can't be beat. I may see a bit farther and a bit more, but my vision's cloudy. I'm not certain of anything."

"Yes, you are," answered Margery. "You're as certain in religion as I am, or my mother herself. Now just there, in a vital thing like that, Jacob's foggy I believe."

"The fog will lift if fog there is. No man can do the things he does and lack for the Guide, I reckon."

"I'll tell him what you say. Belike it would please him."

"Better not. He's not one to care what I might say. I'm a slight man in his eyes. He might even think it was echeek my praising him."

"He likes praise really, though he'd never admit it."

"Depends where it comes from. We don't set no store on the praise of small people and the humble-minded. The praise we ache for be most times withheld. That is if you are ambitious, like Jacob is. A man spoke well of in newspapers like him—what should he care for me?"

"He thinks well of you and says it's a fine thing the way you work."

"No, no—think twice, Margery. You're inventing now—to please me. He's got a very good knowledge of what's worth praise; and a man that does his own duty without flinching, like your man, isn't going to admire them who only do the same. I do no more than that, and the time hasn't come yet when we pat a man on the back for doing his duty; though perhaps it will be a rare sight in the next generation."

"I wish we could look forward. There's some things I'd dearly like to know," said Margery.

"Lord! What a lot we should do to fight for ourselves and them we care about if we could do that," he answered. "If we could look on ten years even and see how we had changed—how habits had grown up and fastened on us, how faith in our neighbours had gone, perhaps, and how, with the years, we'd got more cunning, and harder and more out for Number One—how we'd set to work to fight ourselves—eh?"

"We ought to live so that we shouldn't be afraid to look on ten years," she assured him. "Why not so live that your heart will be bigger and your hope higher and your faith purer in ten years?"

"That's your mother," he answered.

"It's you," she said. "It's you, Adam. You don't need

to fear the years. But I do. I'm different, because I've got children. It's for them I'd love to look on, so as I might head off the dangers, if dangers showed!"

"None have less to dread than you in that direction. Wonderful children—healthy, hearty, sensible. You and Jacob have made a very good blend for the next generation, and that's something to be thankful for. If marriage is a lottery—then what are children? Look at my family. Who'd have dreamed that my fine mother and my good, sane father should have had Samuel, and Minnie, now in her grave, and me—me—only better than Samuel by a hair, and often quite as mad as him! But there it was. The poison was hid away in my mother's family, and they never told father till after he was wedded. A very wicked thing and ought to be criminal—eh? My mother went off her head after Sam was born and had to be put away for a bit. But she recovered and never got queer again."

"I'd like to see you on one of your mad days," she said. "But now it's you telling fibs, not me. Never was a saner man than you; and if you weren't so sane, you'd be sad. But if you're sad, you don't show it. When I'm sad, I can't hide my feelings."

"Much pleasanter not to hide 'em, if you've got somebody close at hand to understand 'em. That's one of the compensations of a good marriage—to share sorrow and halve the weight of it."

She looked at him whimsically.

"Sounds all right," she said. "Perhaps, after all, there's some things we married ones know better than you that bide single."

"For certain. Practice knocks the bottom out of a lot of fine theories."

"The things that you can share with another person don't amount to much," she told him. "The sorrow that can be shared, and so lessened, is only small. If one of my children was to die, would it make it better for me because Jacob took on? No."

A child appeared at this moment and Auna approached from the abode of Mr. Marydrew. Her father's movements were not often hidden from the little girl and she was now about to plunge down the woody lane under Shipley Tor by which he must soon return.

"And how's old Billy, my duck?" asked Margery.

"His cough has gone," said Auna, "and he gave me this brave stick of barley sugar."

She held the sweetmeat up to her mother.

"I haven't sucked it yet," she said. "I won't suck it till father's had a bit."

"He'll be along in a minute, my dinky dear, and give you a ride home."

Auna went her way.

"Billy's terrible fond of her, ever since she went in once, unbeknownst to us, to cheer him up when poor Mercy died. She popped in like a mouse, and sat beside him, and told him what she'd come for; and he liked it."

"A good old pattern of man and wise enough to care for childer about him."

"And who cares for them better than you? A fine father you would have been, and I tell you again it's not too late."

"I've got Sammy—and a very good child too, when he's not crossed. But he can be ugly."

She was thoughtful.

"Small blame to you for not marrying," she said, "I chaff you, Adam; but very well I know why for you didn't."

They relapsed into a lighter mood, and it happened that Winter had just uttered a sharp comment on one of Margery's speeches, which made her pretend to be angry. They were both laughing and she had given him a push backwards, when Jacob came round the corner in his cart with Auna beside him. He had seen the gesture and Margery perceived that he must have done so; but Adam's back was turned and he did not know that Bullstone had appeared.

He was going now, holding his patient horse by the bridle, but Margery stopped him.

"There's Jacob—don't bolt, else he'll think you've seen him and want to avoid him," she said.

The man stopped, therefore, till Bullstone's trap was beside them. Jacob smiled genially and Auna asked her mother to ascend and be driven home. A few words passed. Margery told how her brother was shining as huckster, and Adam hoped that Jeremy had now settled down at last and was on the way to prosperity. Jacob smiled again and hoped so too, and then Margery climbed into the trap.

She spoke of Adam when they had left him, but her husband paid no heed to this matter. He was anxious to know if two letters had reached Red House.

Then he told Auna how good the dogs had been, and she, hardened to these partings, was glad they had gone bravely.

Jacob appeared to be as usual and the contents of his letters served to put him in a good temper; yet Margery was sharply conscious of the hidden watcher that night and, after some hesitation, she decided upon returning to the subject of Adam Winter.

When they were alone she did so, though in doubt to the last moment whether it was expedient. The thing she designed to say might merely serve to remind Jacob of a trifling incident he had already forgotten; but she knew the contrary was far more likely to be the case. The significance of the matter would possibly be lessened by a few words concerning it. She was heartily sorry that the thing had happened; and yet felt it hard and absurd that such a trifle should cause her sorrow. Thus she was in an uncertain mood when she did address him—a mood not indifferent or scornful of the incident, otherwise she had not returned to it at all; but a mood a little regretful for herself, and in no sense tinctured with that repentance, which alone would have made it really desirable to speak.

She waited for some time to see if Jacob himself would

allude to it—a fact that showed how little she really grasped the inner nature of the man; for past experience might well have taught her that his silence was assured. He did not mention Winter at all, but spoke placidly of his children and declared that now the holidays were done and the boys back at school, he missed Peter in the kennels. He then proceeded to tell her that he was glad he had decided to keep Barton Gill in his old, responsible position a little longer. These things drifted past Margery's ear, and then, just before Jacob finished his glass of spirits and rose to lock up, she spoke.

"I'm sorry you saw me push Adam this afternoon. It was a silly thing; but he was poking fun at me, and you know how I'll respond to a challenge. Just an impulse, because I couldn't think of a sharp answer."

"Are you sorry you did it, or only sorry I saw you do it?" he asked, but did not wait for a reply. "No matter—you needn't answer. You keep so young for your age, though you always say you're old for it."

"I'm sorry. I grant it was foolish. But Winter's an old friend, and I feel as if we might almost be brother and sister sometimes. He's good to the children too."

"We'll go to bed," he said.

"Not till you've forgiven me."

"If you know you did a vulgar thing, that's to the good." She flushed.

"I wish somebody had saved your life," she said, "then you'd find that you never can feel to that person same as you feel to other people."

"Christ's blood!" he swore, but hissed it and did not raise his voice to be heard beyond the room. "When are we going to hear the end of that?"

She was alarmed, and echoes of a similar incident, now some years old, came to her memory. She stared at him, then banished her fear, put her arms round his shoulders and kissed him.

"I'm so sorry, dear. I seem to get so clumsy."

He, too, was sorry, though for something other than he now declared. He apologised and blamed himself for being a fool; while in his heart he felt that his folly lay, not in his anger, but the display of it. The watcher had lifted a corner and peered from its concealment; the banked fires had broken into a visible flame. He had been betrayed by the accident of her apology, and shown her something he had no desire to show her.

Her next word accentuated his error.

"I hoped you would have mentioned it and given me a talking to. I deserved it."

"Seeing that I've never chidden you for anything on God's earth in my life, it wasn't very likely I should begin to-night, was it?"

"I might be happier if you did chide me. I dare say I do many things you hate; if you told me so, I wouldn't do them again."

"You may be right; but it's contrary to my nature to play schoolmaster. Where I don't like a thing and can change it myself, I do; but where others are concerned, if it's not my place to order, I don't order."

"I know; but if you'd order oftener, or express an opinion as you have to-night, we might all be quicker to do your will."

"Women like tyrants, it's said," he replied. "But I'm not built that way, and if wit and love can't see to please without being ordered—so much the worse. Forget it; forget it."

"No," she answered. "I'll take very good care not to forget it, Jacob."

"So you think; but true memory comes from the heart, not the head."

He was unusually silent for many days, as she knew he would be. Then he grew cheerful again and spoke of Shipley and the Winters in his customary, indifferent fashion.

CHAPTER V

THE CHILDREN

ON a winter's morning the Red House children were playing in a great ruin which stood near their home. Clay works had brought a busy company to Shipley vale in past times; but now only the walls of the drying houses and the stack of the furnace still stood, while above them, on the hill, large pits, whither had flowed the liquid clay from its bed on the high moor, were now filled with herbage, foxgloves, blackberries and sapling trees.

This famous playground found a small company of children and dogs assembled, and among them, as cheerful as any, was an ancient man. Old Billy Marydrew delighted in young people, and they found him more understanding than the middle-aged.

Children and red dogs romped over ground sparkling with frost, and Billy sat on a stone and enjoyed the entertainment. Auna fetched and carried; Avis issued orders, John Henry with some condescension, took his part. And then he quarrelled with his brother about a terrier that he was trying to teach a trick.

"He shall do it; I'll larn him," vowed John Henry hotly.

"He can't do it—no Irish terrier could do it," answered Peter.

They argued over the ability of the bewildered bitch, and Peter appealed to Billy; whereupon Mr. Marydrew agreed that John Henry was demanding impossibilities.

"When I was as young as you, John Henry," he said, "my father gave me some silkworms for a present, and I

was a determined nipper and thought I'd train 'em up in the way they should go. And I gave 'em some very fine poplar leaves, which other worms be fond of. But my father warned me and said they must have lettuce. 'No, father,' I told him. 'They shall eat the poplar, because I will it. I won't have no caterpillars setting up their wills against mine.' "

"Did you make 'em, Mr. Marydrew?" asked Auna.

"I did not, my pretty. Instead, I found out that, though a small boy can put a worm on a leaf, the whole round world won't make the worm eat it—not if it isn't his food."

"And nobody won't make 'Nixie' stand on her head," vowed Peter, "because it's contrary to her nature to do such foolishness. They French poodles will larn any silly thing; but not an English dog."

John argued to the contrary; Avis and Auna tried to teach the puppies to slide on a frozen pond and John Henry, quite unconvinced, turned to pursue 'Nixie's' studies. But that wise dog had bolted home.

Then came along Jacob Bullstone, and hearing his children's voices, he turned off the road and entered the ruin. He joined the games for a few minutes; then Avis and Peter, who were in charge of the dogs, went homeward, and John Henry followed with Auna, while their father proceeded to the road beside old William.

"I've been to Owley," he said. "My brother-in-law's weakening. Doesn't like this cold weather."

The ancient laughed.

"He'll stand to it a bit longer yet. The pinch be going to come when the babby does. Then he'll have to work for the pair of 'em, and go to market instead of his wife."

"What's the matter with the man?"

"Nothing. A very ordinary sort of man, and if he'd been a lord, or a landed proprietor, or any sort of chap called to spend money instead of earn it, he'd have been a great success. Don't we know scores of the upper people like him? But he wants a thick-set hedge of money be-

tween him and real life. Even as it is, he has had a good bit of yours, not to say his father's. Afore Jeremy Huxam can shine, he must have the mercy and good-will of his neighbours. Their good-will he's got, and their mercy he'll surely want, if there ever comes a time when he's got to stand alone. But a charming chap I'm sure, and not an enemy. Same as your wife, without her pluck and sense, Jacob. Your boys are more like their grandmother than her own son be."

"So I've heard, and don't want to hear it again," answered Bullstone. "Judith Huxam's no great heroine of mine, Billy, as you know. I see myself in my sons, and who more likely to be in them?"

"They're a very fine pair of dear boys, and their fortunes are on their foreheads," said Mr. Marydrew. "Born to command is John Henry. Peter's most like you in my judgment—got your painstaking care for details. He's larning all there is to know about the dogs."

"From me."

"Who else? And why for don't you see all the way with Judith Huxam? My late daughter thought the world of her."

"Too much hell-fire," answered Jacob. "She's narrow and self-righteous, and I don't want any child of mine to grow up either one, or the other."

"A pinch of hell-fire doctrine don't hurt the young," declared Billy. "'Tis true that you and me know the fire's cold; but a lively sense of the dangers of wrongdoing be a good tonic for the girls and boys. I keep in touch with the rising generation, because they believe in me in a way I can't expect you middle-aged folks to do. And I see what they want—discipline. That ain't your strong suit, nor yet your wife's. You go in for example; but that's not enough. You know what's good for a puppy, though I wouldn't say you know so well what's good for a little human."

Jacob laughed.

"You're a wise old bird—to call you 'old.' But how do you keep so young in your mind, William? Is it just character, or do you try for it?"

"I try for it," answered Billy. "Yes, I try for it. You can't keep young-minded at my age without an effort. And this I do. I never look back, Jacob. I don't drag the past after me, and I'm lucky, maybe, because I haven't got much in my past to drag. What is it—what is most of the past—but a garment that makes you uncomfortable, a boot that galls? Let the past bury the past and always look forward."

Jacob considered and struck his gaitered leg with his walking-stick.

"The mind no doubt works healthiest when it's working forward," he admitted. "I know that much. Even the best of the past makes you turn to sadness rather than happiness. Because the good time has gone, I suppose, and never can come back no more."

"That's why business be such a blessing to some minds. Business always means looking forward—so your father used to say."

"He looked forward sure enough, and I've got to thank him for no little that he did," replied Bullstone. "A rare man of business, and nobody ever cut a loss and put it behind him quicker and cleaner than he did. All for land, and pretty well the last thing he said in my ear was, 'Buy in Brent.' He knew Brent to be on the up-grade in his time, and he'd always buy when he could. Some nice parcels I've got for building, Billy; but most of them are not up to my selling price yet."

They talked of Brent and then Jacob looked at his watch.

"Toddle up the valley and have dinner with us."

"Not to-day. I've promised your missis to come Sunday," said William.

CHAPTER VI

HUNTINGDON WARREN

THAT winter passed without event and life at Red House offered no incident of apparent significance whence to date—no upraised point from which the past might be measured, or the future explored. The days repeated themselves until spring, returning, accelerated all pulses and unconsciously increased vitality and will to live and enjoy.

Bullstone's lads neared the end of their studies, and when summer came again, John Henry, in sight of seventeen, prepared for apprenticeship to the business of his choice.

To-day he was riding over the Moor, with his father and a farmer, to see sheep, while Margery and the others made pilgrimage for Huntingdon Warren. They carried their lunch and baskets for the whortleberrries, now growing ripe again; while more than their own food they took, for there had come a baby at Huntingdon and Margery conveyed certain delicacies for the wife of Benny Veale. Old Frederick Veale was dead; but Benny still worked the warrens; though rumour announced that he had nearly done with them and, at his wife's entreaty, intended soon to desert the waste and return into civilisation.

Peter and Auna ran this way and that as they climbed slowly aloft. They met the goats browsing together presently and played with them a while, then hastened after the retreating figures of their mother and sister. And then they played a new game, at the inspiration of Auna, and dyed their faces and hands with whortleberry juice. They were now Indians and, sticking a few feathers from a dead

carriage crow into their hair, and brandishing spears, represented by Peter's fishing-rod, they rushed screaming upon Margery and Avis and demanded food at the point of their weapons.

Presently they returned to the river beyond Zeal Plains, where Auna and her brother washed the berry juice from their faces. Then Peter fished and caught some small trout with a worm. An hour later they tramped forward to Huntingdon Cross, ate their pasties and cake beside it and so proceeded to the Warren House.

Red Benny saw them from afar and came to meet Margery. He was now a stalwart man of forty, and claimed to get more out of the rabbits than any warrener before him; but that, he vowed, was because he worked harder than his predecessors. He was lean and immensely strong, and his wife seemed cut in his own pattern. The unexpected arrival of visitors excited them, for few ever called at their home. Tourists saw it afar, like a white eye under the tumulus on the hill behind it; but it seldom happened that anything but the wild Scotch cattle, or a moorman on a pony, came near the spot.

Sally Veale's second child was six weeks old, and Sally was by no means an invalid. She laughed at the nice things Margery had brought and displayed her baby.

"Red—red," she said. "The daps of Benny."

While Auna and Avis gazed fearfully upon the remains of a dead horse, and Peter played with Mr. Veale's lean lurchers, despising them in secret, Sally prattled to her visitor and declared her hatred of the Warren.

"No place for a woman and two babies," she declared; "and my husband's of my mind. He's pretty well fed up. I want to go to the in-country and for Benny to be a game-keeper; and Mr. Blake, to Beggar's Bush, would take him on next fall, when his head man stops; but Benny's all for foreign parts and more trapping. He says that in the far north of Canada, a man like him could face the winters and catch creatures whose fur be worth their weight in

gold. But if he does that, it will be out of the frying-pan into the fire for me I reckon."

"Work on him to go to Beggar's Bush," advised Margery. "Then you'll come down to Brent and have your neighbours about you. It's cruel and unnatural for us women to be shut off from the world."

"That's what I say. But he's all for the wilds again."

Margery talked of the past. Huntingdon had been a spot on her great holiday pilgrimage with Jacob, before they were wed, and every feature of that long day's ramble her mind held precious still. The old radiance of the image was long departed, yet force of a habit, that had extended through years, still woke an afterglow of interest in certain scenes when she came among them.

She talked of Benny's father, whom Sally had not known.

Tea was prepared and, while they were eating it, Bullstone and his son arrived on horseback. They joined the meal and presently, when the young people were off again, Benny repeated his determination to depart.

Jacob heard the alternative courses and advised him to stop in England, for the sake of his family. Then he said a thing that surprised Margery.

"So like as not I'll lease the warrens when you go—if ever you really do go. I'm very much set on Huntingdon. It's the sort of lonely spot that does me good. If I were to take it, I'd employ a couple of men to live here and keep a room for myself—for sake of health and peace."

"Easier to say you'll employ men than to do it," answered Benny. "Took me a month of Sundays to find a boy. The warrens are very near played out in my opinion. There's not the head of rabbits used to run in my father's time. Nobody will ever lease 'em again if you don't."

Jacob discoursed of Benny's two boys and asked their names. Then Margery was shocked.

"Haven't got names yet," confessed Benny. "We can't come to no agreement. Missis wants a grand sort of name,

like 'Fortescue' or 'Champernowne,' and I say 'Fred' after father, or 'Thomas' or 'Richard.' No good giving children silly names."

"I lived along with the Champernownes as under housemaid," explained Sally; "and 'tis a valiant name."

"It doesn't go with Veale, however," confessed Jacob.

"But if they're not named, they're not baptized!" exclaimed Margery.

"They are not," admitted their father, "and none the worse so far as I know."

"They're not Christians then—oh, Benny!"

"No more ain't I," answered the warrener. "It's no good pretending nothing. No man can breathe a word against me, but I've not got religion and never felt the want of it. More haven't Sally."

His wife contradicted him, declaring that she had always gone to church in her maiden days; and Margery was too troubled to speak.

"Duty's duty and I do it; and if ever I've got time, I'll go into religion also," explained Benny; "but so far time's lacked."

"You must have them baptized whatever you believe, or don't believe," declared Jacob. "You can't let your sons be nameless and outside the pale. That's wrong, Veale, and I hope you'll mend it."

"Don't think I've got anything against religion," replied the other. "It shall be done, if you reckon it ought, Mr. Bullstone. And I'll name one, and my wife shall have her way with the other."

"Haven't you heard about original sin?" asked Margery.

"No, never," replied Benny. "But there's no pride in me and my wife. We'll hunt up some gossips and put the thing in train."

"I'll be one, and I'll buy a christening cake, and you shall come into Red House on the way home and eat it," said Margery. Even the prospect of this modest entertainment pleased her.

The parents were much gratified, and still more so when Jacob also agreed to be a godfather.

"Duty's all right, Benny; but we must have law and order also," he explained. "This is a Christian land, and though Christians differ a lot and some take their religion sadly, and some cheerfully, and some so lightly that it doesn't amount to anything at all, yet we must bow to custom and it won't do you much good with any master to say you're no Christian; because the Christian habit is to distrust any who don't subscribe."

It was arranged that when Mrs. Bullstone returned from her holiday to Plymouth, the children should be received into the Church.

Sally declared great gratification and Benny promised Jacob not to declare himself a pagan—if merely as a measure of worldly wisdom.

"And I hope you'll go one better presently," added Bullstone, "and find you can honestly call yourself a member."

"I always keep an open mind," answered the warrener. "I don't quarrel with nobody's opinions if their practice stands for 'em."

"It's all summed up in that," admitted Jacob. "But, because we fall short in practice, you godless men mustn't quarrel with our principles. The principles are loftier than our powers to reach—to make us aim high, Benny. I don't hold with a lot I hear and see; but then I allow for the poverty of human nature, finding it in myself. And when you know how poor you are yourself, you make allowance for others."

Benny listened and so did the women.

"All true as Gospel I'm sure," murmured Sally.

"Yes," said Margery, who had been astonished at Jacob, "and you two had best set about finding how true the Gospel is."

Somewhat cast down, the warrener and his wife presently witnessed the departure of the Bullstone family.

Jacob decided to walk back and, to his satisfaction, Peter was allowed to mount his father's horse and proceed with his brother. The boys were soon out of sight and Margery, well pleased, walked beside her husband.

The evening was full of gracious light and the west threw a roseal warmth of colour into the bosom of the Moor. The hour was reflected in Margery's mood and she found herself happy, weary, content. Jacob, too, discoursed amiably and praised his eldest son. Sometimes they came thus closer in spirit and wondered secretly why it was not always so. Yet, even as the sun sank and they entered the deep gorges of the river, where it wended toward their home, something of the twilight entered Margery's mind also, by reason of a thing said.

They had dwelt on the past to their mutual satisfaction and he, she found, remembered their lovers' walk of old, which had brought them home again by the same path that now they trod. Their minds were at peace and no dark thought, for the moment, thrust in upon Jacob; no doubt or dread of the watcher saddened his wife. Then she asked a question and, though it was inspired by concern for him alone, there arose out of his answer a spirit of helplessness in her that was swift to awaken the familiar gloom in him. Thus the tramp that had begun with both in good heart, drifted them finally upon silence before they were home again.

"What did you mean about Huntingdon being good for health and peace, Jacob?" she asked. "I didn't like to say anything before those people. But you don't mean you feel your health frets you? You're all right?"

"Right enough. We breathe the same air in the valley as they do on the hill. I didn't mean health of body. I'm so hearty that I don't know my luck in that respect, or guess what it would mean to be otherwise. Health of mind is what I meant. A man's mind often gets sick."

"Not yours I'm sure."

"Don't say that, because you're not sure. Who should

know that my mind often falls sick better than you do? And I've found one healing thing, and that's solitude."

"Surely to God you're solitary enough?"

"You don't know the meaning of solitude," he answered, "because you've never tried it."

"'Never tried it!' What's my life?"

"You imagine your life's lonely and even such loneliness as ours—so to call it—casts you down and makes you miserable. Solitude is no physic for you, and I dare say, if we lived in a town, you'd be a happier woman."

"I'm not lonely really—I know that. Life's a bustling thing—even mine."

"Company is your food and my poison," he answered. "That's how it is. Loneliness—what I call loneliness—is as much beyond my power to get, as company—what you call company—is beyond your power. We've made our bed together and must lie upon it."

"You ought to have thought of that sooner, if you wanted to be a hermit, for ever out of sight of your fellow-creatures."

"We've made our bed," he answered, "and what we've got to do is to keep our eyes on the bright side. Nobody's life pans out perfect. My idea of a good time would be a month at Huntingdon all alone."

"That wasn't your idea of a good time when you married me; and if you say that, it only means I've changed you and made you hunger for what you never wanted before you married."

"You needn't argue it so, Margery. I might as well say that you were happy with me at Red House long ago, and didn't want anybody else but me. Life changes our tastes and appetites; life laughs at us, while it makes us cry sometimes. I want Huntingdon for contrast, because home often comes between me and my best thoughts—because home often fouls my thoughts, if you must know. And you—home makes you hunger for change—change—new ideas—new voices—new faces. Why not? I don't

blame you. We are both smitten and must bend to the rod."

"If you see it so bitter clear, perhaps you could alter it," she said.

"No, no. We can't alter it. I can't be different; you can't be different. It would only be pretending to alter, and pretence could bring no content to either of us. But time—time may make us different. We'll grow numb as we grow old."

Margery was indignant. She restrained tears with difficulty.

"I've prayed for a lot of things," she said. "I never thought to pray to grow old."

"Changes are coming," he replied. "The children will go out into the world."

"Then perhaps you'll have a little of the peace you thirst for."

"I'm too selfish ever to get peace," he replied. "That's the crux and curse of loving a woman as I've loved you. Love and peace can't walk together. You don't understand that. No matter. It only means that if half of you is getting what it wants, then the other half cannot. The knot is there. We can't be happy together, and it's still more certain I can't be happy apart. But you could. That's the difference."

"And you think I might be happy, knowing you weren't? Why d'you say that? What have I done to sink below you in love?"

"I don't know—I wish I did," he answered.

"And you spend your whole life trying to find out," she retorted. "And so you waste your life, because there's nothing to find out."

Occasionally, in moments of indignation, she had accused him thus before; and now that happened which had previously happened on such challenges. He said not another word.

At the kennels he stopped and turned away, while she followed her children to the house.

CHAPTER VII

SUNDAY

JOHN HENRY, Avis and their mother had come on a Sunday, to drink tea with Margery's parents and go to chapel afterwards.

There was trouble in the air; indeed Mr. Huxam, who happened to be ailing, declared that he never remembered so many problems demanding solution at one time. When he was indisposed, he always dwelt on the blessings of retirement and declared that the 'villa residence' he designed to build for his declining years should now be erected.

"I feel it borne in upon me very much of late that we ought to begin," he told Margery, and she agreed with him.

"Jacob's always saying you should start. Not a week ago he was telling me that his bit of land on the north side of the railway ought to suit you down to the ground."

"I've let the chance slip," declared Barlow, coughing and patting his chest. "If I'd been awake, I should have purchased a site ten years ago; but what with one thing and another—chiefly Jeremy—I never seemed to have the necessary dollop of money."

"It wasn't that," argued Mrs. Huxam. "Jeremy, though he hasn't found the exact work yet, can't be said to have cost much in money, if he has in thought. I always warned against looking too far ahead touching the villa residence. But now I do think the time has come."

"'Peace with honour' is what you and me have a right to," answered Barlow, "and if Jacob, among his posses-

sions down this way, has got an acre or thereabout, to please your mother, Margery, so much the better. I want to see the house started."

"Jeremy's really going," Margery told them; but it was no news. Indeed his mother knew more than she.

"I won't speak about the past," she began, "though I haven't heard anybody say that Jeremy failed as huckster, or Jane to market. But now, with a family on the way, the circumstances are changed. So like as not Jeremy will come into Brent and take over Michael Catts' little business—the green-grocer's."

"Leave Owley Cot?"

"Yes. It hasn't suited him too well and he's a good bit cut off from religion up there."

"What changes!" murmured Margery. "Jacob says that Joe Elvin is going down hill rather quick. His health's giving out. In fact Jacob's beginning to look round already for a new tenant, if it must be. Just now we've got distemper in the kennels and he's lost some valuable young dogs."

"I hope he's taking it in a Christian spirit then," answered Judith. "He's had an amazing deal of good fortune in his time, by the will of God, and such men are often a great disappointment under affliction."

"He's vexed, of course, but he doesn't whine about it. You'll never see him cry out if he's hurt."

"His steady luck has not hurt Jacob, as luck is apt to do," said Barlow. "He keeps an even front."

"But he's not sound and commits himself to a very doubtful thought sometimes," replied Mrs. Huxam. "A jealous God reads every heart, Margery, and won't suffer no looseness in matters of doctrine."

"He does nothing but good—a very honourable and up-right man, and more than that," said Margery. "You must be all right if you make the world happier than you find it."

"It is your place to stand up for him," returned Judith,

"and, in reason, a wife ought to say the best she knows of her husband; but actions may spring from all sorts of motives. Good actions may arise from bad motives, owing to the ignorance and also the devious cunning of men and women. All we've got to cling to is the Light, and if a man shows the Light doubtfully, then, however he may seem to shine, we can't be sure of him."

Margery had concealed from her parents the gap that existed in understanding between Jacob and herself. Her father cordially approved of him; her mother had ever expressed herself as uncertain. Now her daughter declared surprise at this fact.

"I've always got to champion Jacob against you," she said. "But I should have thought you'd have been the first to see his qualities. He's like you in a way—don't care for pleasure, or company, and keeps a guard over his lips, and works morning, noon and night. If Jeremy had been like that——"

Mrs. Huxam was not annoyed.

"You can't see all round the human character as I can, Margery," she answered, "and I don't blame you, because such a bird's-eye view only comes with years, and between husband and wife it often never comes at all. What the deep eye looks to is the foundations. In Jeremy's case I laid the foundation, being my work as his mother. And in your case I laid the foundation also. Jeremy has a character that you might call weak, and without religion he would very likely have brought our grey hairs with sorrow to the grave—if I was that sort of woman, which I am not. But the foundation is there, and as for the building, though it ain't very grand to the eye yet, that's the Lord's business. Jacob puts up a finer show, being a man with money-making gifts and experience; but where the foundations are doubtful, who can say what may happen if a shock comes?"

"I wouldn't call his foundations doubtful," answered Margery. "I should say his foundations were the strongest

part about him. Not that I've ever seen them. Nobody has. Jeremy, for all his weakness and instinct for change, gets more out of life than Jacob. Jacob misses a lot by his nature."

"If he misses anything that he'd be the better for having, be sure there's a reason," asserted Judith. "Haven't I seen it thousands of times? Don't ninety-nine men and women out of a hundred miss a lot, just because the one thing needful—the absolute trust and certainty that all is for the best—be denied them?"

"He doesn't grant that all's for the best, because he doesn't think or feel so," answered Margery.

"There you are then! That's weak faith. That's what I'm telling you. The man who pits his opinions against God and doubts of the righteous fate of the world is next door to a lost man himself."

"He's talked of these things," answered Jacob's wife, "for I've challenged him sometimes and said how I believe, with you, that nothing happens that's not ordained to happen. But he won't grant that. He holds much evil happens that we might escape, if men were wiser and more patient and reasonable. He's great on reason."

"I'm sorry to hear it," replied Judith. "Reason is well known for a very faulty shift and the play-ground of the devil. Reason don't save no souls, but it damns a parlous number, and I wish I could feel a lot surer than I do where Jacob will spend his eternity."

Margery was not moved at this dreadful suspicion.

"Goodness is goodness and can't be badness," she said, "and goodness is rewarded. Jacob says religion can't alter your instincts, or your nature; and if you're the fidgety, anxious sort, belief in the Almighty won't make you less so. You may know perfectly well that you ought to trust, like a lamb trusts its mother; but Jacob says you can't always keep your mind fixed on God, when it's full to bursting with a wife and children. I know what he means well enough."

"Do you? Then I'm cruel sorry to hear it," answered Judith, who was much perturbed. "What's religion for but to alter your instincts and your wretched nature? If I thought that man was weakening your faith by a hair's breadth, or casting the shadow of danger over your soul, I'd call upon you on my knees to leave him."

Then Barlow spoke, calmed his wife and endeavoured to lighten the gravity of the conversation.

"Let it be, Judy, and use your brains," he began. "We all very well know what a difficult thing it is to say what we mean, for words beat their makers, time and again, and half the trouble in the world, so parson tells me, was begot at Babel. And I doubt not that what Margery says Jacob told her, wasn't exactly what Jacob thought he'd told her. Plain mouth-speech is a very hard thing to reach, and if we, who keep a shop, don't know it, who should?"

"He's very sparing of words at all times," added Margery.

"Jacob," continued Barlow, "is hard in some things and silly soft in others. But every man that was ever born does silly things in a woman's opinion, off and on. And women have got their own silliness—to the male's eye. Not you, Judith, but the race in general. Women drive men wild sometimes, and we drive them wild. The difference is that generally they tell us if we disagree with them, and we ain't so open."

"That's true," admitted Margery. "And nought, I'm sure, vexes a woman more than to know she's going wrong and not be told how."

When Judith had gone to put on her bonnet for chapel, Margery returned to the subject of the villa residence and cheered her father up.

"I want to see you lay the foundation brick," she said, "and I hope you will start next spring if not sooner. It's high time you and mother slacked off."

"It is," he answered, "and I can see myself doing it; but I can't see her."

Avis and John Henry returned at this hour and presently, leaving Mr. Huxam behind to take care of his chest, they proceeded to the temple of the Chosen Few. Jeremy appeared with Jane, and Adam Winter and his aunt were also among the small congregation. Margery felt glad to see Miss Winter, for she now liked better to speak with Adam when another was present. For pride, she had not mentioned past events to him, and the man guessed not that he had ever won a harsh word or thought from Margery's husband behind his back.

There was a measure of truth in Barlow Huxam's argument, for Bullstone sometimes missed conveying the warmth he felt, from frugality of spoken words. His deeds atoned in the judgment of most men and women, since speech conveys no special unction to bucolic minds. It is only the urban populations, fed from youth upon the newspaper, that are so easily hoodwinked by volubility.

Leaving her mother refreshed by devotion, Margery joined Amelia Winter on the homeward tramp to Shipley. Adam asked after the illness in the kennels and expressed regret at it. Then Margery inquired for Sammy, who had cut his leg when mowing fern.

"He's all right," answered Samuel's aunt; "but him being laid by for ten days opened our eyes to his usefulness, didn't it, Adam? Take the bull alone. 'Turk' is a queer-tempered party, and nobody else will dare face him; but along with Sammy he's a proper lamb. My nephew orders him about like as if he was a dog, and will even dare to hit him over the nose if he's cranky."

"A very queer truth," admitted Adam. "There's something in Samuel that gets over 'Turk.' They understand each other. We're going to show the bull at Brent Fair presently, and if he falls short of a prize, I don't know what my brother will do—talk to the judges I expect!"

The famous Pony Fair was near at hand and, on the occasion of this annual revel, not only ponies, but sheep and cattle came to Brent.

"No chance of your master going to the revel I suppose?" asked Adam. "Never shows himself at such times."

"I wish he did," answered Margery. "I'm always on at him to have a bit of fun when it offers, which isn't often. But pleasuring's pain to him."

"Get's his pleasure different. I met Benny up over, and he says when he's off next year, Mr. Bullstone will very like take on Huntingdon—for his health."

"For his mind's health," answered she, not sorry to breathe her grievance. "He's such a lover of peace that he feels a day or two up there sometimes—beyond sight and sound of his fellow-creatures and the fret of his family—would do his tormented mind a lot of good."

"Fancy! 'The fret of his family'—eh? Takes every sort to make a world, no doubt, and the sort that knows its own luck is the rarest of all."

"I understand, though I don't share, his feeling," explained Margery, who instantly supported Jacob when any other questioned his manner of life. "It's the contrast from the racket and din of home. You're a bachelor and seem like to stop one, so you don't know and never will know what a noisy, bustling house with childer in it exactly means. But to a thinker, like Jacob, there comes a craving to get out of reach of real life sometimes. A spell of silence and his own company always put him in a good mood. He'll go off for the day when he can, on some pretext, but I know it means a day of solitude. Solitude doesn't mean loneliness to him. It's a craving, like some men crave for drink."

"You're not the same though?"

"Not I. I love company and pleasant faces and the news. I shall be at the fair with my children."

"I'm fond of a rally myself. You'll drop on very nice people at them times—folk you only see once a year, very like, and yet are glad to call friends. Pony Fair's a great place for meeting such. Sammy's for it, too, though you wouldn't think so. And never takes a drop too much, if

he's got animals to look after. So I always see that he has. But if he's a free man with no responsibility, then he'll let himself go and get blind in no time."

Elsewhere the children discussed a more serious subject. They had heard a stern discourse and considered it.

"I can stand hell better in cold weather than hot," said John Henry. "Makes you sweat in the summer, but warms you when it's frosty."

"You didn't ought to say that, did he, Miss Winter?" asked Avis; then she explained John Henry's view to Amelia.

"Let hell alone," answered the old woman. "Remember there is such a place and just keep it at the back of your mind—same as we always keep a kitchen at the back of the house. Heaven's your eternal home we'll hope. Be you going to the revel?"

"All of us but father," said Avis. "He won't go, but mother's taking us."

"You'll have a nice swing in the 'roundabouts' I expect."

"I shan't," said John Henry. "I'm going to learn about the cattle; so's Robert Elvin from Owley. He's older than me, but he don't know a bit more about farming than what I do, though he's been at it near two year."

"Don't you puff yourself up, John Henry," warned Amelia. "You hear my nephew, Mr. Winter. He's been a farmer for five and twenty years, and yet he'll tell you there's always more and more to learn."

"That's one for you, John Henry," said Avis.

The boy considered what to reply. He suffered reproof from men, but hated it from women.

"I only said that Bob Elvin didn't know more than me. I didn't puff myself up," he answered, "and if I've still got a lot to know when I'm so old as Mr. Winter, then I shan't be much of a farmer."

"Time and human wisdom don't stand still," explained Amelia. "There's always a lot left to know about every-

thing, because larning increases and new-fangled things are always coming to the top. I dare say pigs will fly some day. If you ever catch yourself thinking you know all there is to farming, John Henry, then you'll do very well to be frightened, for that'll mean you're going to get left."

"I ain't afeared I'll get left, Miss Winter," he answered stoutly.

The fair continued to be matter for general conversation. Amelia alone was not going.

"Too old," she said. "Half the pleasure of a revel be to know you ain't coming home to an empty house and the fire out."

"You'd better keep Jacob company," advised Margery. "I'm always wanting him to find new friends, because the old ones drop off so."

"There's no doubt Jacob's first friend is that ancient man, Billy Marydrew. And a very companionable, cheerful old bird he is. But he's up home eighty, I believe, and have got to go pretty soon," replied Adam.

"Yes," admitted Margery. "He's my husband's dearest friend, I do think—except one. Funny he should have one at both ends of life."

"The other being?" asked Adam.

"Why, his own youngest—Auna."

"And a very dear, dinky child to have for a friend," admitted Amelia Winter. "But in my experience it ban't wise for a man to fasten on his darter, specially if she's going to grow into a pretty woman before you can look round; for then comes love and good-bye. A maid shares her heart with her father only till the lover comes."

They parted at the gate of Shipley Farm and Margery followed her boy and girl, who had run forward. It was dusk and still. Already the owls hooted from the fir wood.

CHAPTER VIII

THE REVEL

MORNING broke in misty promise on the day of the Pony Fair, and Samuel Winter was first to set forth from Shipley. He had been up since light making the great bull's toilet, and now man and beast tramped together through a meadow in the valley, where was a field path that shortened the journey to Brent. 'Turk,' in his lordly prime, strode through the white meadow mist behind Samuel, who led him by a rope attached to a ring in his nose. The great red 'Devon' had curls on his forehead, short, stubby horns and a broad back, as flat as a table from shoulder-blade to haunch. He was in grand fettle, and Samuel, too, looked transformed from the slouch of every day. He wore his best clothes, a new, hard hat and a blue tie—his last birthday present from his aunt. Yellow leggings completed Sammy's attire and he puffed a pipe, sending smoke into the cold, morning air, while Turk snorted warm, sweet breath, that turned to steam.

John Henry and Peter were the first to start from Red House. Indeed they overtook Samuel and joined the procession of the bull.

At a later hour Margery, Avis and Auna drove off in a trap together, and they passed Adam Winter on foot, also journeying to Brent for the day.

Jacob made it clear that he should not visit the township, or the fair. He was going to Owley, to see Joe Elvin, and might then ride further. Margery begged him to reconsider his determination and join her presently; but he could not undertake an enterprise so distasteful.

"I shall hear all about it afterwards," he said.

He ate his dinner alone and then rode out, stopping a moment to see Mr. Marydrew. William was just emerging from his cottage gate, dressed for the revel.

"How's the distemper?" he asked.

"Got it under. It will be past in ten days. The trouble has taught me something and made me think better of my son, Peter. Good pluck and good sense there, Billy."

"I told you what was hid in that boy."

"Off to the fair, I see."

"Yes, faith. Not many more junkettings in store for me. And, finding the day so brave, I felt up for anything. Josh Peatheyjohns is going to give me a lift from his corner."

"And what do you get out of this racket and noise, and crush of beasts and humans?" asked Jacob.

Billy laughed.

"What do I get out of it? Well, I get pleasure out of it—an old man's pleasure. First there's the pleasure of following custom and doing, yet again, what I've done more than fifty years already. And to be well enough to go at all is a pleasure in itself. Then there's the old faces and funny customers I've known when we were boys—a good few yet. And then there's the sight of the young; because if you can't have a good time yourself, the next best thing is to see somebody else having a good time. And to watch the young enjoying themselves and doing all the same things we did, brings back the past in a cheerful sort of way."

"I'm answered, then," replied Jacob, "and it's a good advertisement for your pleasures, Billy, that you can live them over again in others. When I'm old, there will be nothing like that for me."

"You're too old for your age as it is," answered the elder. "There's nought makes a man grow old before his time like brooding and over-much thought. Solitude

throws you in on your own nature, Jacob, and a man's own nature ain't always the best company for him."

"That's true enough."

"On an annual great day like this, nobody did ought to turn his back on his neighbours, but go amongst 'em in a spirit of good-will and charity. A gathering of jolly souls is good for the heart, because you're drove out of yourself, and hear other opinions, and rub off the rust of the mind."

He chattered till Josh Featheys and his market cart appeared in the road ahead.

"Come on, grandfather!" shouted the farmer, and soon Billy was borne away, while Jacob rode his horse through the autumnal lanes. He passed Bullstone Farm, but did not enter; then he descended to Glaze Brook, where the ancient pear tree stood, more ghostly than ever in its cerecloth of grey lichens; and then he climbed to Owley.

Robert Elvin had already gone to the fair, with two ponies and a dozen ewe lambs to sell. His mother and father were at home, and Jacob, tethering his horse, knocked at the door. Mrs. Elvin admitted him and he soon sat beside the sick farmer. Joe suffered from paralysis and was now bed-ridden. He took his troubles ill and seemed not very grateful for Bullstone's call. His wife was weary and worn. She confessed, as she saw the visitor to his horse an hour later, that it would be a great blessing when it pleased the Lord to remove her husband; and she uttered a hope that Jacob would not feel her son too young to carry on.

"Bob's a man in all but years," she said, "and you can trust him, as Joe has trusted him ever since he was struck down."

But Bullstone made no promises. He condoled with the wife and agreed that her husband could not go too soon, since his life was a burden to him and all brought in contact with him. He praised Robert, who was favourably known, and, after leaving Owley, rode round the farm and

satisfied himself that no neglect appeared. He then called on Jane Huxam at Owley Cot and heard that Jeremy had gone to the fair. Jane was packing and she declared herself very sorry to depart.

"The green-grocer's is likely to suit my husband best, however," she said, "because the brightest of him, which is his manners, is thrown away as a huckster. He's a born shopman and he'll be nearer his parents, which will be a comfort. Yes, there's dilapidations, Jacob—I see your eyes roaming round; but nothing to name; and when Margery was here backalong, she granted I'd took very good care of the garden."

"Where are you going to live?" he asked.

"Over the shop. It's smaller than this nice house, of course, and no beautiful garden. We can't expect that; but it's in a good part of Brent as you know, and but two minutes from the post-office."

Jacob grunted.

"Jeremy's thrown away the best chance he's ever likely to get."

"I hope not. He's not much of an open air man really—specially in winter. His gifts shine indoors. And he was wondering if you'd want the hoss and trap back, as unfortunately we've never been able to pay for 'em, or whether you'd be so exceeding brotherly and generous as to let him have them still—for the green-grocery. Of course it would be a godsend if you could; and, if all goes so well as we expect, he ought to be able to pay you back with interest in a year I shouldn't wonder."

"You're hopeful," said Jacob. "A good thing that he married a hopeful pattern of woman."

"And every right to hope," she answered. "Jeremy's no common man. If he was a shopwalker in a big business, he'd be worth thousands to it. In fact he's one of those who are likely to be worth a lot more to somebody else than himself."

"As long as you're satisfied, Jane——"

"Well satisfied," she said.

He looked at the baby—a boy.

"Teach your little one to know his own mind; and don't let him be brought up like a feather in a gale of wind."

"If he's half the man his father is, there'll be no call to quarrel with him," said Jane. "He's going to be like his father outwardly, and his grandmother sees the promise of character already."

"You'll be close to her at Brent, my dear."

Jane was cautious.

"We shall—parlous close; and as an 'in-law' to Mrs. Huxam, Jacob, same as me, you go in a bit of fear, too, no doubt?"

"Not I."

"Well, you're older and powerfuller than me, of course. But she's got a weak spot, which you haven't found out and I have. Jeremy's her weak spot, thank God. She sees what a man he really is under his bad luck, and he'll never go scat really—not while she's above ground. She feels to Jeremy same as Mr. Huxam feels to your wife. And I dare say you've gained by that sometimes."

"I didn't know that Barlow Huxam is specially set on Margery," he answered.

"Oh, yes, he is," said Jane. "So they're both safe, and both will be snug sooner or late. Of course that don't matter to a rich man like you; but it's a comforting thought for me. Those the Lord loveth, He chasteneth—so Mrs. Huxam says; but anybody can weather a few storms if he knows he'll be safe in port sooner or late."

With this nautical simile, Jacob left Jane to continue her packing. And then, as he turned his horse's head for home, a sudden whim took him and—why he could not have explained to himself—he decided to go to Brent and look upon the fair. Thinking back in years to come, he dated a very perceptible increase of his soul's sickness from that day. It was a disease of an intermittent sort, masked sometimes by circumstance, drugged some-

times by the passage of events; but fitfully it progressed, punctuated by incidents; and from the day of the Pony Fair, it always seemed to the man that his ailment grew, until it blotted clean thinking and, by its progress, so weakened reason that the end came before its time, but not before he was sapped and riddled with the poison. He knew also, that but for the act of chance and the hazards of his well-protected life, the venom might have remained immune within his nature for ever. But the accidents of existence offered a seed bed, and the thing increased until a climax inexorable swept away the foundations of his ordered days and left him to the challenge of the ruins.

Cloud banks already ascended over the horizon southerly as the sun sank upon Ugborough Beacon; but weather could not now defeat the day, or lessen its triumph. A very successful fair had rewarded local effort. Prices were good and the ponies brought a harvest to their owners. Crowds wandered over the enclosures, and the last competition, for driving hacks, was in progress at four of the afternoon. Jeremy and his father were watching it, with Avis and Robert Elvin, who had sold his stock to satisfy himself. Then the boy and girl drifted away together and Robert entertained her at various stalls, where sweetmeats and trumpery were being sold. They listened to Cheap Jack, and presently Robert invited Avis to have her fortune told by a green-and-yellow parroquet. He paid sixpence out of five shillings of his private savings, and an Italian woman set her little bird about its task. It plucked a grubby card, and Avis learned she would marry a dark, handsome man with plenty of money.

"I hope that will come true," said Robert.

"Now see your luck," urged Avis; but Bob was not going to spend another sixpence in this fashion.

"Your luck might be mine," he murmured, and Avis, who thought well of the youth, made no comment. She was sixteen now and Robert eighteen.

Sammy Winter stood, a grotesque and gloomy figure, thrusting up between 'Turk' and another bull. He wore a blue rosette in his hat; but it represented the second prize and gave Sammy no pleasure whatever. He protested and growled to all who would listen; and if looks could have slain 'Turk's' conqueror, the monster must swiftly have perished.

'Turk' was lying down and chewing the cud, indifferent to his moderate honours; while his guardian talked to Billy Marydrew and explained the iniquity of the decision.

"Never mind, my dear," said Billy. "Us can't all be first. Your turn next. 'Turk's' young yet. He'll have plenty more chances, but the winner's past his prime."

Mr. Marydrew wore a little flag in his buttonhole and a little worsted and wire monkey stuck in the brim of his hat. Thus he echoed the spirit of the hour and ambled cheerfully about with a friend or two.

John Henry and his brother had studied the sheep and cattle and watched the competitions. Then they joined other boys at a shooting gallery and presently drifted to a boxing booth, where John Henry was invited to spar with a lean, curly-headed Dago, but declined.

Auna kept close to her mother, who found many acquaintance at the fair. On the occasions of entertainments, she had grown to be glad if her husband happened to be out of the way; for she knew that he was happier so, and her own pleasure, without his restraint, became greater. She felt self-conscious before other people with Jacob beside her, but struck a more unrestrained and joyous note when he was not there.

They had met Adam Winter at a steam 'round-about,' where wooden horses revolved to the blare of an organ. Here he was spending pennies for the entertainment of some young people and invited Auna to mount, which she gladly did. Then, as an afterthought, he urged Margery to take a steed and did the same himself. Auna, her pleasure much increased by this arrangement, held her mother's

hand as the horses whirled round, while Winter, sitting on the steed behind them, tickled Auna's ear with a peacock's feather. The light began to grow dusky, but the liveliness by no means abated. People crowded now round the dancers, now at the wild beast show, now among the 'Aunt Sallys' and swings.

Upon this scene Jacob descended from above, and, over the upper edge of the field, was able to see much from his uplifted position on horseback, though, since his head was but little higher than the hedge, none observed him looking through it. He was about to ride to the entrance, when he observed the big 'round-about' within thirty yards of him. Thus he saw Margery and Auna, watched Auna helped on to a wooden horse and then marked Margery and Adam Winter enter upon their juvenile amusement with other adults. He saw them circle, observed the rare jollity and high spirits of his wife, the evident pleasure of the man. Then the folly of intruding upon that crowd of cheerful spirits weighed him down and he turned and rode off. He carried away only the memory of Margery's happiness. She was laughing as she never laughed at home; she was chattering to Adam and her face was flushed. And Winter rode behind her, as though she belonged to him, while he played with Auna. Who was the master of Shipley to do such things? Bullstone's bias swiftly exaggerated the spectacle that his eyes had chronicled, and the essential virus in his own imagination soon poured out to leaven all. He saw Jeremy ahead as he trotted home, but Jacob entered a gate and took a way through fields and a plantation, to avoid his brother-in-law and everybody else. He did not wish it to be known, or reported again, that he had been in sight of the fair. As for Jeremy, he had borrowed a few shillings from his father and was now returning to Jane and his infant son with futile fairings.

Before he reached Shipley, Jacob wrestled with his reason concerning what he had seen; but he could not dismiss the vision, and he told himself that it was impos-

sible to determine the gravity of the situation until the end of that day. He troubled himself as usual by dwelling on details. He wondered what would have happened had Auna not been there. Then, perhaps, instead of tickling the child with a peacock's feather, Winter might have dared to touch Margery. . . . So the poison flowed. He tried to block his mind once or twice, but it was useless. He could not get away from what his eyes had seen; he kept returning to every childish detail. Then he fought to put all behind him until his family returned. Upon what Margery might choose to reveal of the day's doings much would hang: so he assured himself. He desired the night and their home-coming. But they would not be back until late, for it was understood that they supped with the Huxams and stopped for the fireworks destined to end that day.

The fireworks tortured him again. Who would be watching the fireworks with Margery? Time dragged unspeakably. It seemed to him that his wife had been gone for an age. At nine o'clock he walked out as far as Shipley Bridge to meet them. Would Winter accompany them? Would they have offered him a place in the Red House trap? They could not, unless the boys walked home. Otherwise there would be no room.

Darkness had descended and the autumn stars shone, for the threat of rain had passed for a while at sunset. He debated whether it would be worse to find that Winter had driven home with his family, or had not done so. It was certain that, to such a mood, whichever course Adam might take would present the graver anxiety.

He loitered, waiting for the sound of wheels while night thickened, the stars disappeared, at last fine rain began to fall. A heavy fish splashed in the river, and then he heard, far off on the hither hill, shouts and roystering laughter clear through the stillness. He knew that it was Josh Peatheyjohns back from the fair, taking leave of Billy Marydrew. He wondered what his old friend had made of his day, how much whiskey he had drunk and how the

morning would find him. Then a trotting horse came briskly down the lane to the bridge and he heard his children's laughter.

Would it stop and drop Winter, or no? He could only see the vague mass of the cart and the yellow ray it shot from a lamp into the mist. It did not stop, but went forward over the bridge, then turned to the right for Red House. All his family were there no doubt with John Henry driving. He hastened homeward arguing against himself.

At home he found a merry party chattering in the kitchen, and was invited to see the fairings and hear of the day's fun. Peter had gone to put the horse up and John Henry told his father of those who had won the prizes and how the sales had gone. Margery declared the fair was a great success and all considered it better than for ten years past. Avis showed gifts from Robert Elvin and told how well he had sold his lambs. Auna cuddled to Jacob on a great settle by the fire. She was very sleepy, but had to exhibit a peacock's feather.

"Mr. Winter gave it to me, father," she said.

The plume brought back the 'round-about' and, acting on impulse, Jacob took the feather and thrust it into the fire.

"Unlucky," he said. "We won't have a peacock's feather in this house, whoever gave it to you, my precious."

There was silence and Auna gazed, round-eyed.

She never questioned her father. His word was wisdom on every subject; and though he had often rated his boys for repeating ancient superstitions and laughed them out of the old folk-lore, she did not remember that.

"Mr. Winter didn't ought to have given it to me if it's unlucky," she said.

Margery felt the cloud, that had lifted for some good hours, limning heavily about her. She knew Jacob's excuse was nonsense, but she did not guess the reason for his act and, unseen, resented it.

"To bed, to bed!" she cried. "Be off, Auna, and you, Avis. Our chatter won't interest father."

Peter returned, asked after a suffering dog or two, heard that they mended and then retired with John Henry. Margery's maid was returning on foot. Barton Gill had gone to bed.

Jacob hung some of the damp coats to the fire and threw on a turf or two.

"You've enjoyed yourself?" he asked.

"Yes—we've had a merry day. I'm sorry Auna took that feather, but I couldn't well refuse to let the kind man give it to her. I didn't know you were superstitious and I'm sure Adam Winter didn't. We live and learn, don't we?"

He waited for her to speak on, but she prepared to go to bed.

"Tell me about your adventures," he said slowly.

"No adventures—just a fair and all the fun of the fair. The usual thing—all very noisy and merry and a good deal that was silly I expect; but it takes you out of yourself, and you see a lot of people happy and forgetting their troubles for a minute. That's something."

"What did you do?"

"What didn't I do? Played about like a girl. Avis spent her time with Bob Elvin. I think Master Bob has lost his heart in that quarter. He's old for his age. John Henry was all for the stock and the machines, and Peter poked about on his own. We had a very nice holiday dinner with father and mother and, after it, father came to the fair, but mother stopped in the shop and let Miss Reed, from the post-office, go off duty. Then Jeremy turned up and we all played about. I took the children into the wild beast show, then they went their ways again—all but Auna. She kept with me and we went riding on a 'round-about.' Yes, I did, and I'm afraid I thought how vexed you'd have been if you'd seen me."

"Why?"

"Oh—not dignified and all that. But it was the spirit of the fun. Auna loved it. Lots of grown-up people rode."

"And when did Winter give Auna that feather?"

Margery laughed.

"Lord, my dear, you ought to have been a lawyer. How do I know? He was there—everybody was there but you—and we met him. His bull 'Turk' only got a second, and poor Samuel was cruel vexed about it. We shall have to look after Avis and Bob. Did you see his father? He told me that Joe was no worse—just a bed-lier for evermore, poor chap."

Jacob's mind was far from Mr. Elvin. He felt that Margery should have told him she had ridden on the steam horses with Adam Winter. He had given her opportunity and she doubtless remembered the incident very well. But she was not going to tell him. And it was equally certain that he would never tell her he had seen her. His mind sickened, then, conscious of her question and ignorant that three minutes had passed since she put it, he answered.

"Yes, I saw Joseph Elvin. He is taking his misfortunes in a pretty poor-spirited fashion and seems to think to escape them and pass into peace is an evil. He pecks at death with his long nose, like an angry bird in a cage. I told him death was no great matter for them that died, only for them that are left behind; but he says in his case, if he's got to go, it will be a very unfair and unrighteous thing and contrary to justice. As if he was the first that had suffered from injustice!"

"He's not dead yet, however."

"No; only living death. He'd hoped to retire and have a few years of ease, before the end, so he's very angry it isn't to be."

"Poor chap. It is hard. Bob's much set on carrying on. Should you think he could do it, with his mother and the head man?"

"Yes, I think he could. I think very well of him."

"But his father must reign while he lives of course."

“Of course. No need to tell me that.”

They talked in desultory fashion for ten minutes longer, then their servant appeared and Jacob locked up and put out the lamps.

He did not immediately follow his wife to bed, but strode up and down the kitchen deep in thought. Once or twice a dog barked from the kennels and he stood to listen. Then he tramped up and down again for a little longer. He had no wish to speak any more and did not go upstairs until he knew Margery would be asleep.

At last, as the clock chimed midnight, he took off his boots and leggings and ascended to his chamber. He listened at his children's doors. The boys, who slept together, were still talking and he looked in and told them to go to sleep. The girls also slept together and he entered and listened. Both slumbered. He bent over Auna's bed and kissed her; but he did not go to the larger bed wherein Avis lay.

CHAPTER IX

THE GIFT

MARGERY, on her way to the post-office, called upon her brother at the green-grocer's. Jane and he had settled in and Jeremy declared that the future might, at last, be regarded as cloudless.

"I've come into my kingdom," he said. "I find I've got a feeling and understanding for fruit and vegetables you wouldn't believe. It was hid in me all these years, waiting to get its chance. Mother says I dress a window better far than anybody she's known. I've got a great instinct for a pattern, Margery, and a pattern always makes an appeal to the human eye. You can catch almost any sort of mind with a pattern, and what better for patterns than apples and oranges and so on?"

The end of the year was come and Jeremy had excelled himself with a design of fruit and brussel sprouts. On the green ground he had arranged 'A Happy Christmas' in yellow bananas—magnificent, but not business in the opinion of experts.

Her brother once more showed Margery the wonders of the shop, and Jane explained the working of the till, which interested her most.

"Once a week I go to Plymouth to buy choice fruits," explained Jeremy, "but, at this time of the year, there's very little demand for the highest things."

"Or at any time in a place this size," said Jane. "We've had pineapples and other curiosities go bad on our hands, and I pray he won't bring any more back, because you

can't return 'em when they're past their prime, which very soon happens to 'em."

"These are the higher touches and flourishes you may say," explained Jeremy. "The solid backbone is greens and roots, including potatoes. Did the notice over the shop strike you? Just 'J. Huxam' in chocolate and gold?"

"Shall you sell poultry?" asked Margery, and Jane hoped they might do so.

"A little game also," said her husband. "There's nothing interests the better class of customers more than a good row of pheasants, or a hare or two. But that's for the future. For the present I'm wanting to make it known that my quality in fruit and vegetables is far ahead of the old shop. Then, again, it's wonderful what you can do selling coals and coke on a small scale to the cottages. I might develop in that direction—of course not myself, but employing a staff."

It had always been Jeremy's ambition to employ a staff.

Jacob Bullstone met his wife presently by appointment at the shop, and Margery made her Christmas purchases. It was also understood that Jacob conveyed a couple of tons of potatoes to his brother-in-law. The crop had been so large at Red House that Jacob found himself with more than he would need and he now offered the business of selling his surplus to his wife's brother. Jeremy was delighted and engaged to get a price high above that of the wholesale markets.

"I'm working up a class of customer who can be trusted to pay for the best, which is all they want. Such people are only to be got by accident, and I catch 'em with patterns. They are passing by perhaps, and never thinking of the class of fruit I sell, when they just glance in, expecting to see the usual dreary piles of apples and mounds of nuts and so on; but instead—well, you've only got to look in the window yourself. And I change it all every second or third day. Don't I, Jane? I've got a mind for

designing really, and I feel sometimes it's a thousand pities I wasn't taught the designer's art."

Customers interrupted Jeremy and they left him for the post-office. Jacob came to do an act of kindness and was interested to hear how his father-in-law would take it. He called it a 'Christmas box' and, under that name, he had offered Barlow an acre of good land with a road frontage, a quarter of a mile north of the railway station. It was a site in every way worthy of the habitation Mr. Huxam proposed to erect during the following spring.

He had not seen Jacob since receiving this gift by letter, and now he declared himself as absolutely unable to accept anything so great.

"We all know you for a very generous man," said Barlow, "and this I'll so far meet you as to do: I'll pay what you paid for the land, which still leaves me and my wife very much in your debt. Because the ground to-day is worth double what you spent upon it ten years ago."

Jacob, however, would not budge.

"It's to be all, or none," he said. "You must take my gift my way—that I insist. Only a small mind grudges to receive gifts, and I know you're large minded enough for anything."

"I am," confessed Barlow. "As I said to Judy when your letter came, 'this is the sort of seemly act which may well happen between a man and his son-in-law.' And needless to say that all we have, my wife and me, will go to Jeremy and Margery and their children, when we have no more need for it. In this case, if it is to go through, we should leave the villa residence to Margery."

"That's your affair," answered Jacob. "It's an idea altogether outside my scheme of things, though perhaps not hers."

Then Mrs. Huxam appeared. She was not emotional on the subject of the land, but dwelt on other aspects of the new house and the great changes entailed by retirement. Then Margery brought her back to the gift and in-

sisted on some expression concerning it. Judith, however, proved exceedingly dry. She was consistent in her famous conviction: that nothing happens outside the purpose of an all-seeing and all-loving Creator.

"I am quite pleased about it," she said. "When the Lord wills a thing, it's always a great joy to weak, human nature if they thing appeals to us and we can accept it in a humble, human spirit without having to call upon faith. As a rule, when God acts nowadays, so faulty have our natures grown to be, that it generally demands great trust and faith to see He is right; but when I heard Jacob had given us that parcel of nice, sloping land under the plantations, I said, 'Good!' I was glad for my husband, but I was still gladder for Jacob, because we all know it's more blessed to give than receive. We envy his power of giving and hope to be spared to practise it. Meanwhile, to receive is very good discipline for my husband and me."

After supper Jacob and his father-in-law were left alone to discuss the ground, and Barlow brought out the plans of the new house. He manifested a larger sense of obligation than Judith; indeed he apologised for her.

"You mustn't take it in bad part," he said. "My wife has such an amazing sense of what's right, and such a lofty idea of human duty, that it never surprises her when people do good and kind things. It's a compliment to human nature, in a way, that she can see such virtue displayed without showing surprise. If you was a different sort of man, then, no doubt, she'd have been struck dumb with wonder and hesitated to take the gift, fearing some hidden motive for it; but with you it's all plain sailing and above-board and in your character. You can't get a grape from a thorn, and if a thorn offers you a grape, 'tis best to think twice before you taste it. And so, in a word, the way my wife have taken this is really a compliment to you, and between me and my valued son-in-law there's no question at all about the gift hurting. In fact that's nonsense."

"You're a much cleverer man than you think you are,

Barlow," answered Jacob. "You're so often called upon to smooth places left rough by your high-minded wife, that you do it like second nature. But it argues great judgment and skill in you."

Mr. Huxam was pleased at this praise.

"I believe I am a clever man in my small way," he admitted. "Judy sees it, too; but she's doubtful if it's a virtue or a vice. My best art is to get round sharp corners. It's a very useful gift in a shop, and in life in general. For that matter life itself is a shop, Jacob. We all bring our small wares to market, and some get a purchaser and some never do. What think you of Jeremy's new venture? He says it's been the dream of his life to have a fruit shop. But he's said that before about everything that offered."

"I envy him his skill to win people," answered Jacob; "and it's a good thing he's got that skill, because he'll always want his fellow-creatures to help him fall light."

"I'm afraid so. I understand him better than his mother, though don't you repeat it. She reckons that once Jeremy's in his proper notch, we shall have a very cheering experience; and she also knows that the virtuous man never is called to beg his bread. That's all right; but Jeremy's gifts ain't the sort that'll ever find butter. He's a very ornamental sort of person; but ornament without usefulness is a vain thing."

Elsewhere Margery spoke with her mother and revealed a growing interest.

"Have you ever thought upon Robert Elvin, Joe's son, at Owley?" she asked.

"I have not," answered Judith. "Why should I think upon him? He comes in sometimes, on errands for his mother or father. Civil spoken and a good face."

"It will sound funny to your generation, but I reckon he's after Avis."

"They're children, Margery!"

"To you, yes; not quite to me; not at all to themselves.

Bob is nearly nineteen and has done a man's work for a couple of years now, and Avis—she's old for her age too. She likes him."

"Chasten her then. She didn't ought to have an eye for a male for years yet."

"It's all very pretty and natural. She can't help it, and she don't know in the least what it means I expect. But he does. He's not a gadabout boy, or fond of the girls—quite the contrary; but he'll often come over of a Sunday to dinner now and—look at her. And Jacob likes him. He likes his nature. I wouldn't say but that Bob Elvin suits him better, in a manner of speaking, than his own sons."

"If so, then a very wicked thing," answered Mrs. Huxam. "I trust you're wrong, Margery, because that would show something in Jacob that's contrary to religion. And when you see things contrary to religion, hope dies. And if you tell me he looks at another man's son more favourable than upon his own, then I little like it."

"It's nothing unnatural, mother. Bob's very quiet and attends to Jacob's every word. John Henry and Peter don't listen to him as close as they might. They're full of their own ideas; and Jacob doesn't pretend to be a farmer, though, of course, he knows all about it really. But he lets John Henry run on and never troubles much to contradict him. And Robert don't run on. He listens and says but little. He's anxious above his age, with the cares of the farm and a dying father. He's called to think of many things that my boys haven't got to think about. We cheer him up."

"There's nothing whatever to cast him down about his father," answered Judith. "That's a part of life we've all got to face; and if Joe Elvin is right with Christ, then to see him getting daily nearer his reward should be a good sight for a good son. It's only selfishness makes us mourn, just as half the big, costly marble stones in the churchyard are stuck up to ourselves rather than to the dead."

"Like will cleave to like, and his two sons aren't like Jacob very much. He loves them dearly, mother, and is proud of them; but he don't care to see any of us coming forward. He's sensitive and shrinking about his own. I never shall understand all there is to him and I won't pretend it. One thing is sure: he never wounds by intent, like most men do when they're angry. He never is angry outside. He has a sort of cold anger; but you can't always tell why, and he never lets you know why. Of course every man has got his own difficulties and the side he hides from his wife."

"Not at all," answered her mother. "Many men hide nothing, for the very good reason they've got nothing to hide; and many men hide nothing, for the very good reason they can't. Look at your father. Would I have stood secrets and 'cold anger' as you call it? I wouldn't stand hot anger, or any sort of anger; because well I know that he's got nothing to be angry about. For that matter to be angry at all is godless and means weak faith."

Margery had sometimes considered the wisdom of confiding her difficulties to Mrs. Huxam; but she had never done so. She was not proud for herself, but still felt very proud for Jacob; and to confess the truth would be to weaken him in her mother's eyes. In a sense she was glad that her husband could be jealous of her, since she supposed that such an emotion only existed in connection with very deep and passionate love; and if he had long since ceased to give any outward signs of such a love, (by sacrificing himself more to her reasonable tastes, for example) jealousy, she thought, must none the less prove that fierce affection still existed unseen. She, therefore, conscious of the baselessness of his error, troubled only occasionally about it and was wholly ignorant of its extent, of its formidable and invisible roots in his nature, ever twining and twisting deeper for their food, and finding it in his own imagination alone. So she kept dumb concerning her discomfort, and indeed, disregarded it, save at the fitful intervals when

it was made manifest before her eyes. And she erred in supposing these almost childish irruptions sprang from no deep central flame. To her they were in a measure absurd, because she knew that they were founded upon nothing; but her error lay in ignorance of origins: she had never glimpsed the secret edifice that her husband had built—a house of dreams, but a house solid and real and full of awful shadows for him.

They walked home together presently and Margery told Jacob how greatly he had pleased her father.

"I know him so well," she said. "It moved him a great deal."

"It didn't move your mother, however."

"Yes it did; but you understand her way of looking at things—at everything that comes along."

"What did you think of the land regarded as discipline for them?"

"I thought it rather fine," said Margery. "It was so like mother. We can't appreciate the high, unchanging line she takes. It doesn't surprise her when men do generous things, any more than it surprises her when they do wicked things. That's her knowledge of human nature. And the pluck of her! How many are there who don't feel favours to be a bit of a nuisance; and how many have the courage to say so frankly?"

Jacob considered this.

"Wouldn't you have felt just the same, even if you weren't stern enough to say it?" she asked.

"Yes—I suppose I should."

"You may have the chance some day and find yourself in debt for gratitude."

"Gratitude should not be difficult, however."

"Why, I've heard you say yourself it's a terrible rare virtue! And you know, for no kind man has laid people under obligations oftener than you."

"I've never asked gratitude, Margery. The pleasure lies in doing a good turn."

"Very well then," she answered. "Remember your pleasure may be a sort of one-sided pain to the other party. Only with some people, of course. Some clatter enough gratitude I'm sure; but often the most grateful hide it. Mother's grateful enough. She knows what men can rise to, but she also knows how seldom they do. She never denies praise in the right quarter. Though she may not thank you, she'll thank God hearty enough, and no doubt say a prayer on your account also. The Chosen Few may not know everything there is to know; but they know it's difficult to be as generous as you; and when things like that happen, it cheers them, and they praise the Lord for letting His Light shine out so clear in a fellow-creature."

This pleased Jacob and he accepted it.

"Very good, Margery," he said. "I'm glad you said that. I thought something different. I thought gratitude depends on the giver as much as the gift, and I reckoned, because your mother doesn't like me, that she didn't like the land. But I see clearer now and have got you to thank."

"Mother does like most of you," answered his wife. "She likes you quite as well as you like her, Jacob."

Then they fell silent and his momentary warmth faded.

CHAPTER X

AFTER THE HOLIDAY

CHANCE is half-sister to destiny, and though her patterns appear less orbicular and complete, yet seen in the fulness of their weaving, from a standpoint sufficiently detached, they are often as inexorable and consummate. As Jeremy built designs with his apples and oranges; as Jacob built the ideal Bullstone terrier, working year after year with canine flesh and blood to attain the ideal; so chance, operating upon his temperament, defied its own slight name and wrought, with personal intention as it seemed, rather than unconscious accident, for a definite object. Chance appeared to exercise a malign ingenuity in finding substance. It was as though an initial incident had opened the eyes of Moira, weaver of destinies, and upon that trivial circumstance, she had elected to build the edifice of Jacob's life, choosing only one fatal material for the fabric, to the exclusion of others that might as reasonably have been selected.

The new year began; then, after a pause, wherein progress proceeded so slowly that Bullstone was not aware of movement, a quickening period followed. Thus he had always advanced—by jolts and thrusts forward—never smoothly. But remission did not blunt the raw edges of incomplete work; they were always ready to receive the next addition, when reinforcement came to the ghostly builders.

With another summer, Margery's annual holiday to Plymouth returned. It was Auna's year to accompany her mother, and when both were gone to Mr. Lawrence

Pulleyblank, Jacob speculated as to whether his wife, or his youngest child left the larger gap in his life. He examined the problem and decided that no comparison could be instituted, since each represented a different plane of existence and a different field of emotional interest. But though unable to pursue the problem through any rational argument, to solve it was easy enough. His own soul told him that he missed Auna more than her mother; because Auna was far nearer what Margery had been when first he loved her, but could be no longer. Bullstone shared the usual rooted conviction of the married, that their partners have mightily altered during the years of united life. He assured himself that his own foundations were exactly as of yore, and that still he stood for the same ideals and purposes. It was Margery who had changed; Margery who had been blown away from the old anchorage in his heart and now sailed other seas. But in Auna he believed that he saw again exactly what his wife had been; in Auna he perceived growing all that had made him fall in love with Margery. Thus now he lived the more happily in her companionship. She was close to him and she loved him with devotion; but his wife did not. She had gone afield. He knew not how far off she had really wandered, but believed that the gap between them continued to lengthen as the years passed; that her outlines grew dimmer; that less and less she shared his days, more and more pursued her own, where he possessed neither will nor power to follow. And she had reached to a similar opinion concerning him.

Margery and Auna had been away a week, and Auna had already sent her father two letters full of her adventures. Then Jacob happened to be with Barton Gill, who was now reduced to milking the goats and doing other tasks within his waning activity. For the present Avis, free of school and not desirous to learn more that school could teach her, was exalted to kennel-maid, a part she filled with enthusiasm.

Gill was grumbling as usual and expressing revolutionary doubts concerning goats' milk for puppies. Peter had already dared to question its supreme value and Barton, who thought highly of Peter's knowledge and personally disliked the flock, began to wonder if the later wisdom might not discover a substitute. Jacob, however, would not hear of any change.

"Time you stopped altogether and took your ease, Barton, if you're going to put Peter's opinions higher than your own experience," he said. "Goats' milk was the first and best food for puppies long before my boy, Peter, came into the world; and it will continue to be long after he goes out of it, theories or no theories. The modern idea is to get the old, fine results all round, with half the old, hard work; and, such a fool is man, that he believes it can be done."

Then came Sammy Winter along the river path beside the kennels. He peered in, tried the iron door and finding it locked, shouted to Jacob, who stood within the yard. At his noise a dozen dogs barked and Bullstone admitted him.

"Evening, Samuel. And how is it with you?" he asked. "Haven't seen you this longful time."

"I be very nicely indeed," answered Sammy, "but our sheep-dog ban't; and I should be most thankful if you would come over, or else Gill, and look at his paw. He's drove something into it—a hob-nail I dare say; but he won't let me look, and he yowls and shows his teeth if I offer for to touch him."

Gill laughed.

"Fancy that now, Sammy—you, so bold as a hero with 'Turk,' as nobody dursn't handle but you, and yet feared of a little thing like a sheep-dog. I never would have believed it."

"You shut your head," answered the other. "You don't know nothing better'n to milk goats. The dog's a devil-dog; and I'd have shot him long ago if I'd had my

way. But he's a terrible useful dog and if anything was to overtake him such as death he'd be a cruel loss. And if you dare to say I be frightened, Barton Gill, I'll be revenged against you some of these days."

Samuel was easily moved and could never stand the mildest jest against himself, or his brother. He glowered at Gill and his jaw worked.

"Don't cry about it," said Jacob kindly. "We've all got our likes and dislikes, Samuel. I wouldn't handle bees for the world, yet you can go among them and take the honey, brave as a bear. We're all frightened at some thing—if it's only our poor selves."

"'Tis a devil-dog, I tell you," repeated Sammy, "and 'Turk' hates him as much as me."

"Well I don't fear him. But can't Adam tackle him?"

"Yes he can. Adam's got the whip-hand of him, I grant. But Adam ain't there. He's gone away."

"Gone away—where?" asked Bullstone. "It isn't often your brother takes a holiday." A proleptic throb went through him. He felt that he knew Samuel's answer before he made it. And he was right.

"To Plymouth, after calves. Some proper calves he've bought off a man; and he's bringing 'em home by rail on Tuesday; and if I ban't at the station with this damned dog, I don't rightly know what might happen."

Bullstone was silent for a few moments, then he returned to the present.

"Come on," he said abruptly, and going to a little chamber at the kennels, collected a pair of gloves, one or two instruments and a bottle of healing lotion. These he put into his pocket and set off to Shipley Farm beside Samuel.

He asked concerning Adam's purchase of calves, but the other only knew that they would arrive early the following week and must be met.

The patient—a great, high-sterned English sheep-dog, with touzled head and bright eyes, one of which was blue, the other green—showed no temper to Bullstone, but he

harboured private grudges against Samuel, who had been cruel to him in secret, and he probably associated his present misery with the enemy. Jacob extracted a large splinter of wood from his paw and dressed the wound, while the bob-tailed dog expressed nothing but well-mannered gratitude and licked his face.

"He'll be all right in twenty-four hours, Samuel. Shut him up till noon to-morrow, so as he can't get running in the muck, and give him an extra good supper," advised Bullstone. Amelia, who had witnessed the operation, thanked her neighbour.

"And Adam will be properly grateful, I'm sure, when he hears tell of it. A very friendly thing, and I never thought as you would come yourself."

"Your nephew's at Plymouth—eh? My wife and Auna are down there with Mr. Pulleyblank," explained Jacob.

"To be sure. And I hope the sea air will do Margery good. She've looked a thought pinnickin and weary to my eye of late. Too thin, Jacob."

"She always enjoys the change. I might go down for a day or so, perhaps, and fetch her back."

"A very clever thought," declared Amelia; "and I've asked Adam to bide there a few days, for he never takes a holiday and it will do him good and rest him. So I hope he will bide."

Bullstone weighed every word of this conversation as he walked home, and he lay awake till the dawn, oppressed—now striving to see nothing in it, now confronted with visions that worked him into a sweat of doubt and dismay. He determined to go to Plymouth. He laid his plans. Then he banished the thought and decided against any such step. Auna had not mentioned Adam Winter in her letters. He rose, lighted a candle, descended and read them again, to be sure. They cast him down immeasurably, because they mentioned that Auna had been on the sea for a long day with her great-uncle; but her mother had not gone. Margery did not like the sea. She had been free—planned to

be free—of Auna and her uncle—for many hours. And Winter was in Plymouth.

He returned to his bed and suffered a flood of desolate thoughts to flow through his mind, till barn cocks were crowing against each other in the grey of dawn. He got up, threw open his window and saw stars still hanging over Shipley Tor. Then he returned to his bed again, and worn out, slept at last. It wanted but five minutes to the breakfast hour when he awoke, then dressed hurriedly and descended unshaved to his children.

He was very taciturn; but they did not notice that he kept a heavier silence than usual and chattered among themselves.

“‘Red Beauty’s’ got her puppies, father,” said Avis.
“Four.”

“Good—good,” he answered.

John Henry was going to Bullstone Farm for the day and meant to spend some time with Bob Elvin at Owley also.

“Mother thought that when I went, I might take one of the ox tongues she cured, for Mr. Elvin, because he can’t let down his food very well nowadays,” said John Henry.

“An excellent notion,” answered his father. “Be sure you remember it.”

“And ask Bob if he’s coming Sunday,” said Avis.

John Henry laughed knowingly.

“No need to ask, I reckon. I’ll tell him you’ve got a new hat, with a jay’s feather in it. He couldn’t shoot a jay for you, but I did.”

“I’ll lay he’ll shoot a jay when he’s got time,” answered Avis.

“‘Got time,’” sneered John Henry. “If I was after a maiden, I’d make time to shoot an elephant, if she wanted one.”

They chattered and Avis was well pleased. Their talk drifted past Jacob where he sat. They did not notice that he ate no breakfast.

Time dragged dreadfully for the man and a letter from his wife did not shorten it. He half hoped that she would mention Winter; but Margery made no allusion to the farmer; and Bullstone knew that if she had mentioned him, he must still have read evil into the fact. He told himself that. Margery could not have met with Winter by an accident in a place so large as Plymouth. If she had met him, it was by design. He made himself believe that they had not met. But he intended to be sure, though he would not ask her. Margery's letter was frank enough and her time appeared to be fully engaged. She was feeling better and stronger. She sent directions for home and wrote of things to be told to the servant, to Avis and the boys. Auna was enjoying herself and loved to be on the sea.

Adam Winter would be coming back on Tuesday, according to Samuel; therefore Jacob invented a message for him and sent Peter to deliver it. But he returned to say that Mr. Winter had not come home. The calves duly arrived and were safe at Shipley; but Adam delayed for a few days, to make a longer holiday, as Miss Winter had suggested.

Bullstone battled in secret and came to a bitter conclusion. It was exceedingly unlikely that such a man as the master of Shipley would dawdle by the sea for his health's sake. Some far greater and more pressing reason kept him from home. Jacob raged over this, departed from himself and determined upon an action entirely foreign to his genius. He resolved to see Winter and challenge him. He planned to confront the man and woman when they returned and judge them out of their own mouths. But he knew, even while he designed such drastic deeds, that they would never happen.

Winter returned some days sooner than Margery was due to do so. She had, indeed, written a second letter to Jacob, asking if he would let her extend her holiday for three days at the entreaty of her uncle, who made a great

favour of it. She apologised for the delay, but knew he would not mind. He raised no objection, and avoided Adam Winter, desiring now that he should first find whether Margery made any mention of him when she came home.

He drove to Brent and met his wife and daughter at the appointed time; and he found Margery well and in unusually cheerful spirits. Like every woman whose existence is subject to the tyranny of the passing hour, her nervous energy and temper had both gained tone from rest. But she declared herself as beyond measure delighted to be home again. Auna, too, was much more talkative than usual. She had brought her father and brothers and sister presents from Plymouth, and again and again declared her delight at the sea. Twice she had been upon it and seen a trawl shot and fish caught. But neither she nor her mother had anything to say of Adam Winter, and, after fighting with himself not to do so, Jacob took opportunity to question Auna when her mother was not present. It argued a new attitude and he suffered before sinking to it. Indeed for some time he resisted the temptation; but the thirsty desire to discover things possibly hidden conquered pride. He convinced himself that he must leave no channel unexplored and face every painful need to attain reality; while in truth he lived in a world of increasing unreality and his values steadily began to have less correspondence with fact.

Auna caused a passing revulsion, and his heart smote him before her ingenuous replies to the questions that he put. He asked for no direct revelation, but came to the matter sidelong and sought to know what his wife did for entertainment on the days that Auna went to sea. The child was apparently familiar with all that Margery had done on shore while they were separated; but the circumstantial account of her mother's doings, evidently related to Auna on her return, awoke new suspicions. For why should Margery have been at pains to tell the child so much

and relate her doings so fully? Auna had not seen or heard of Mr. Winter. Jacob mentioned the fact that their neighbour was in Plymouth at the same time as the child and her mother; but he did not follow the statement with any direct question. He mentioned the coincidence as of no importance, and when Auna declared that she had not known it, added casually, "Mother did not see him, then?"

"I'm sure she'd have told great-uncle if she had," answered the child, "because he's so good to everybody, and great-uncle would very like have given Mr. Winter a treat and let him go trawling."

Whereupon Jacob, stricken to passing self-contempt, made one of his great, periodic efforts to believe that all was well with his life. Margery had come home stronger and more cheerful than he had seen her for some time. She was full of activity, and she found her home very sufficient for present happiness and interest. She seemed a closer and more understanding friend than usual to her husband, and he argued with himself and strove to build hopeful resolutions upon her good-will. But to attempt such a position now, or regain peace, even for a brief interval, though it entailed immense concentration on Jacob's part, was in reality impossible, for the man had reached a main attitude from which no final retirement was likely until the actual truth should be attained—either to support and vindicate him, or confound him for ever. He struggled to some vague standpoint of hope for a little while. It served him but two days, then perished before a meeting with Adam Winter.

Adam saw Jacob pass his gate on the way to Brent and hastened to stop him before he went out of earshot. He flung down his fork, for he was digging potatoes, and joined his neighbour. Winter's object was only to thank Jacob for tending his sheep-dog; and when he had done so, he spoke of an incident from the immediate past as though it had no significance whatever.

"Funny how small the world is," he said. "To think that two such stop-at-homes as your wife and me should actually meet in a great place like Plymouth!"

Jacob seemed to forget that Adam was part of the tale himself. For a strange moment he looked through him merely as the teller—as a machine narrating fearful facts and not implicated in them. His mind thrust Winter and Margery back to Plymouth. He was alert, strung to acute tension. He pretended.

"Odd you should meet sure enough," he said, and felt the perspiration break on his forehead.

"Yes, faith, I saw her looking in a shop window in George Street. 'Hullo, Mrs. Bullstone, nothing ever happens but the unexpected!'" I said, "and she jumped around. Two poor strangers in a strange country we were, and glad to meet according. We drank a cup of tea together. But you'll have heard all this."

"Yes—yes—she told me all about it. I must get on now—I must get on now, Winter."

He hurried away and Adam, disappointed of a talk, looked after him in some surprise. He had not the faintest notion that Jacob was distressed at the matter of their few words, yet could not fail to see perturbation. This appeared still more apparent five minutes later, for then the farmer marked his neighbour walking back to Red House. He had evidently changed his mind about Brent and was now returning home.

In truth a great storm had raged in Jacob after leaving Shipley and he was tossed to confusion among frantic thoughts. He could not understand; he read guile into everything that concerned his wife. He assured himself that, as soon as his back was turned, Adam would go up the valley to speak with Margery. He felt certain Adam had read him, and was not deluded into thinking that he had really known these facts. Adam would doubtless perceive he had made a mistake to mention his meeting with Margery at all; and he would then hurry off to warn Mar-

gery. Inspired by this suspicion and feeling it vital that he should see Margery before she learned of Winter's conversation and admission, he turned back and made haste to anticipate the farmer.

But Adam was still working in his garden. Jacob guessed that he might meet Margery coming from Red House to see the other man; for she knew that he had gone to Brent. Jacob told himself that it would be wiser in future to keep his movements a secret. But, after all, Margery was not upon the way, and she expressed genuine astonishment when he appeared.

"Forgotten something?" she asked.

"I don't forget," he answered. "It's for others to forget. But I remembered certain facts, and they saved my journey. I turned just beyond Shipley Bridge."

He made no mention of Adam Winter, but changed his mind again, said nothing and took occasion to keep at home until Margery had next met Adam herself. This happened within a week, when she went to Shipley Farm to see Amelia. Her manner was pensive after she returned, and Jacob expected that he would now have some story from her. He knew that she had met Winter and doubtless learned from him how the thing she had chosen to conceal was out. For his own reasons apparently Adam had chosen to record the meeting, while Margery had not. But why had Winter mentioned the incident at all? How much easier to have said nothing. His wife's manner changed after her visit to Shipley Farm, and on the evening afterwards, she asked Jacob to walk with her up the valley in the idle, sunset hour.

Instantly he guessed what she was going to say, and a great regret flashed through him that he had not himself challenged her, after seeing Adam Winter. Then her version of the meeting might have possibly differed from the farmer's and helped him towards the truth; now that they had spoken together, no doubt she would have heard what he had said and echo his version.

Jacob decided to hear, yet believed that he knew what he would hear.

Above the kennels, Auna River wound through a deep place, where the moor descended to her margins and only a fisherman's path ran through the brake fern. Between steep and verdant banks the waters came, and upon the hills round about flashed gems of golden green, where springs broke out of the granite and fell from mossy cradles to the valley. Here and there the water-side opened on green spaces cropped close by the rabbits, and at intervals a little beach of pebble and sand extended by the shallows of the stream. Now the river spread her arms to make an islet, where grey sallows grew and the woodrush; and sometimes she narrowed to a glimmering cleft, then by a waterfall leapt forward again into the light. A warm evening glow lay upon the eastern hill and each isolated stone, or tree, burnt with sunset brightness; but the valley was in shadow, very cool after the heat of a late August day.

"I always love this place and this time," said Margery. "It's full of memories—precious ones to me."

"I thought you were like Billy Marydrew and never looked back," he answered.

"You must look back, to save heartbreak, if the past is happier than the present. To remember pure happiness—that's something."

"It only makes the present worse than it need be. To know what life might be and feel what it is—that's the bitter spring where half the discontent in the world rises from."

"And the jealousy and mistrust and bad will too, I dare say. Look here, Jacob, I'm cruel sorry about Adam Winter. I'm sorry for myself, and sorrier for him."

"But not for me?"

"Yes, for you, because you're such an infant still—groping and blind for all your wisdom—and no more able to read character than a child. I met Adam Winter in Plym-

outh. I was alone. Auna had gone to sea with Uncle Lawrence and I'd been to the Guildhall, where there was a great concert. But I came out before the end, because I was tired of it, and looking in a shop window Adam found me. We went and had tea together. And then he told me his aunt had begged him to stop a few days more, so we fixed to meet again, and we did do, when Auna was to sea again. And once more we had tea in a big shop in the midst of the town."

"But you never breathed a word of this until you found that Winter had told me about it."

"I did not, because I feared it might vex you."

"Vex me! Is that all? A pretty small word."

"Surely large enough for such a small thing. It couldn't, at worst, do more than vex you to know I'd met a good neighbour and drank tea with him."

"I'd give my immortal soul to look in your heart," he answered.

"It's always open for you, if you'd believe your eyes."

For a moment he did not speak. Then he asked a question:

"And why did you do what you knew would vex me?"

"I did it because I wanted to do it, being sure no honest reason existed against. I set no store by it and never thought of it again. If I'd thought of it, I might have asked Mr. Winter not to mention the matter; but—no, that's not true neither. I certainly should never have dreamed of asking him that."

"Why?"

"Good Lord! Can't you see? What would it have made you look like. I'm proud for you as well as myself. I know you wouldn't have liked me to drink tea with him; but how could I tell him that? He would have wanted to know why you didn't—and then—for that matter I don't know why myself. I only knew in an unconscious sort of way, remembering silly things in the past, that you wouldn't have liked it."

A hundred questions leapt to Jacob's lips; but he did not put them. She was, he thought, guiding the conversation away from the actual event. She had told him what she had arranged with Winter to tell him and no more; and that done, now wanted to leave the subject, saddle him with folly, call him a child, and so come out as the aggrieved party. But this he would not suffer.

"Did you know Winter was going to Plymouth?" he asked.

"I did not. He only decided to go after I left."

"But he knew you were there?"

"Yes; but he was just as surprised as I that we met."

"So you say."

Then she flamed and turned upon him, in such anger as he had never seen from her before.

"What are you doing? What are you trying to do? D'you want to smash up your home? D'you want me away? If my record these seventeen years is that of a woman you can't trust out of your sight, then say so and I shall know what to do. But think—think for God's sake first, and use your wits, and get your mind clear of all this beastliness. Try and look at life from my point of view, for a change, if you can. I'm many years younger than you and I married you for pure love, well knowing that I'd have to give up a few things—nothing compared with the joy of wedding with you—but little knowing how many things I'd have to give up. I've lived here—and never hungered for the pleasures—the fun and stir—that meant so much to me; I've let much that would have made my life fuller and happier go without a sigh, because I had what was better; and now—now, in sight of middle age—this. And I'll not endure it, Jacob. Much I'd endure—anything—everything in justice and reason but this is out of reason. It's a needless thorn—a scourge for an innocent back. You wish you could look in my heart. I wish to God you could; and you'd see what would shame you—shame you. D'you know what stock I am, if you don't know

what I am myself? And I tell you this: I've been a good, faithful mother to your children and a good, faithful wife to you. That all the world knows, and if I was to start and whine about being kept like a broody hen under a coop, there's many would sympathise with me and blame you; but if you were to whisper in any ear on earth that I was not all I ought to be, the people would call you a moon-struck liar—and that's what you would be."

"I don't shout my troubles, Margery."

"No; because you well know what they'd sound like if you did. Instead you breathe the bad air of 'em, and let 'em foul and sicken you. They only look out of your eyes when I look into them. You take cruel, good care to hide them from everybody else—and so do I—for common decency. Why d'you hide them? Tell me that. And I tell you I won't much longer hide them—I swear I won't. If you think evil of me, then let it out. Point your finger at me before the people and hear what they'll say about it. I've lived your life without a murmur, but if so to do, and sink myself in you as I have done, is to win no better reward than—— There, we'd best to leave it before I say what could never be unsaid."

He did not immediately answer. He was impressed—for a moment relieved. Her indignation rang true. He felt disposed to express sorrow and even promise practical proofs of his regret at causing her such suffering; but he considered deeply first. He had to convince himself that these words were sincere and not merely uttered by a woman acting cleverly to hide her cherished secrets. They sounded as though from her heart: she had never spoken with such passion; but such a clever woman might be quite capable of pretending, if she thought it wise. He wanted to believe her; for if he could do so, it would lift his immense agony off his shoulders at one gesture and lighten the load of the past as well as promise some brighter hope in the present. He perceived that, if he could believe her, the situation was saved, for he would have no difficulty

in thinking of a thousand things to prove the sincerity of his own regret and the size of his own amendment. He would not be ashamed to confess his errors to Margery, if she could convince him that they were errors.

They walked silently side by side for a few hundred yards and she waited for him to speak. She grew calmer and realised the quality of her tremendous counter-attack. She had never stripped him bare to himself in this fashion; but she did not regret a word. She was hating him heartily while she spoke. Only his tyranny and her long endurance held her thoughts. Apart from his own troubles, which she scorned as the folly of a lunatic, she was glad that opportunity had offered to remind him of hers. He had outraged her, and no word that she could speak was too hard for him. So she still felt.

Her temper rose again at his continued silence.

"Things are at a climax now," she said, "and I won't have no more doubt and darkness between us. It's wrong and sordid and mean and hateful. You've got to say you're sorry, Jacob—you've got to tell me straight out, in plain words, that you're sorry for what you've thought against me, for God knows how long. You've got to do it, and you've got to show me you mean it. Either that, or I'll leave you. I'll go and live my own clean life and not share yours another week."

"That's quite true, Margery. There's no third course."

"Decide then; decide, decide this instant moment if you call yourself a man. Why should I breathe the same air as you and suffer what I'm suffering now while you make up your mind? Why should you have to make up your mind? What devil's got in you to make you doubt a woman like me? Or do you doubt all women? If you do, you're mad and ought to be locked up. When I think of it, I wish to Christ this river had drowned me into peace afore ever I gave myself to you at all."

She flung herself on the ground and wept; her anger expired. She was only bitterly conscious of dishonour

and degradation. Not built to suffer very deeply, or very long, suffering, when it did come, broke like a hurricane over Margery and beat her down before its onset. But she had a spirit to spring up again, a spirit avid for such hope and happiness as might be within reach. It was a spirit as innocent as a child's, and her pleasures were such that any child might have shared them with her.

Jacob Bullstone slowly expressed contrition. He imagined that he believed her; and the conviction plunged through his soul, sweeping bare the rocks and channels. It was real and did a temporary, cathartic work; but while it cleansed the stuff he was made of, it could not alter the stuff. By an effort of will he abased himself. He knelt down beside her and prayed for forgiveness. He poured scorn upon himself and talked until, knowing that much speech was foreign to him, Margery began to be fearful of this phenomenon and her tears dried. She bade him cease at last; but he persisted and showed himself a new man in her eyes—a strange man, whom she presently began to pity. She knew that Jacob would never be the same to her again; but she did not know whether he would stand ultimately higher, or lower, as a result of what had happened between them. She was weary and unspeakably sorrowful, for her heart could not be hard and her natural sympathies were large. He seemed to roll back time and even speak with the voice of the lover from the far past. He pleaded for absolute forgiveness; he was very humble and he promised on his oath to change from that hour.

“God helping,” he said, “this is a day that shall see us nearer and dearer to each other than ever we have been. And I ask you to forgive, because I want you to do that before you see what I shall do, Margery, and not afterwards. Bear with me if you can a bit longer yet; trust the future till I show you what I’ll make of it.”

She was glad enough to accept all that he said and to express regret for her own words.

"Let us forget for mercy's sake. Let us forget every syllable and go on with our lives," she said.

"Forget never," he answered; "but go on with our lives we will. Watch me."

She had it on her lips to add:

"And for Christ's sake, don't watch me;" but she did not endanger the harmony now attained. She remembered how they had walked in this place as lovers, and she put her hand in his. Thus they went back silently together.

1912.

6 round the table.

1. Mamma.
2. Mamma.
3. George.
4. Willie.
5. Billy.
6. Me.

1958.

only 1 left
me.

CHAPTER XI

THE OFFER OF OWLEY

A POSITION was defined and an understanding attained between husband and wife, while the unconscious party to their difficulties knew nothing. Thus Adam Winter, in absolute ignorance of the fact, stood upon the brink of events for which he was not responsible—his life being, as all lives, much at the mercy of his fellow-creatures.

Margery's pride kept her tongue still, for she would have endured anything rather than confess the truth. The truth not only stultified Jacob, but it would cast an unjust doubt upon herself if revealed to any other. She knew that many husbands had cause for jealousy and she guessed that, if she warned Winter of Jacob's weakness, he might, while certainly taking no blame upon himself, judge that no smoke existed without fire and imagine that, in some quarter, she had given Bullstone a real cause for his emotion. She valued the farmer's good opinion too highly to risk implanting any such suspicion in his mind. She saw no reason why she should not be fair to herself, and indeed little temptation to speak to anybody longer existed. She had accepted Jacob's apology and the promise of contrition, and since the latter presently took an active form, there rose in her a genuine thankfulness that the long-drawn horror was dispelled. She leapt to welcome the relief. She grew happier and the sensation of increasing resentment, that she should be called to endure his distrust—the sense of living under perpetual insult which she had indicated to him in her anger—died completely.

Jacob himself made a supreme effort and performed ac-

tions that presented great difficulties to him. He ruminated for days in solitude and then took two steps, the one trivial, yet rich with satisfaction for Margery; the other momentous. He hesitated long concerning the latter; but opportunity for the first quickly offered and he took it.

To the amazement of his family Bullstone announced a day of pleasuring, and it was not such a day as he sometimes planned—no picnic into the wastes of the Moor, or other excursion, which meant little delight for anybody but himself and Auna. He proposed to take them all to Totnes Races—a jollity beyond their utmost expectations. The youngsters were openly incredulous, only Margery understood and appreciated his sacrifice. The day passed without a cloud and, when night came, his wife thanked Jacob in words that repaid him well.

"I'm not going to pretend to myself that you enjoyed it," she said; "and I know, with your nature, you couldn't, my dear. The trains were enough, without anything else. And yet I wouldn't have had you away, and I wouldn't have gone without you. But you've given a mint of pleasure to us all; and the children are grateful, and I'm more than grateful."

"Let be," he said. "It was a well spent day and I'm none the worse for it, if those I care most for are the better."

But greater things were in his mind and, when the news came that Joseph Elvin was near his end, Bullstone took action. He hesitated long, for he looked ahead and told himself that the cost of failure would stir banked fires and waken evil fears he was fighting to destroy for ever.

He designed a great proposition and everything depended upon another. Immense good must result if the other could meet him, and a stroke precious for his peace be accomplished; but should his suggestion be opposed and declined, then more than passing disappointment would be the result. He reached a point where a serious hitch de-

layed decision. The man he proposed to approach was Adam Winter, and now, labouring over every detail of the coming conversation, he tried to look at it from Adam's point of view. Immediately his mind was up in arms. Everything hinged on motive, and the great problem centred in Winter's attitude and Winter's secret opinions of what inspired the offer about to be made to him. Bullstone was almost minded to abandon his project after viewing it from this standpoint. For, though to any other man, his motive must be obvious enough and grounded in Jacob's own advantage, to this particular man it was possible it might appear in another light. For Jacob knew very little of Winter and he could not dismiss the weight of past prejudice. It seemed impossible that there had never been anything whatever on the other side, and that his own accumulated tortures and tribulations were all self-inflicted. Adam surely must have some shadowy inkling that he was not a favourite of Bullstone's, and his conscience must indicate the reason. Jacob had reached a point of self-deception from which it was impossible that he could regard Winter as absolutely innocent in thought. And that being so, might not the master of Shipley suspect something lay hidden under the problem to be presented and the offer to be made? Might he not, in truth, guess at the vital reason for Bullstone's approach?

For some weeks Jacob delayed and wearied himself with this problem. Had he submitted it to Margery, she had instantly solved it: that he knew; and he knew how she would solve it. She would assure him that the last shadows still haunting his mind were unworthy of him and might well be dismissed. She would declare his suspicion absurd and reiterate her assurance that he was putting into the mind of Adam imaginary ideas which had never entered it. But along that road was danger and he had no desire to reveal thoughts that would check Margery's present happiness or suggest that he was going back on his word. She believed him purged. Then a new fear crowded

down upon him. For Margery must presently hear of his offer to Adam, and how would she take it? If Winter might read into it an inner motive, how much more certainly would she do so.

Again he hung fire; and then Joseph Elvin died and the need arose for decision. In the event of failure, he had already determined what he would do. Indeed the alternative entirely satisfied him, and so far as Owley Farm was concerned, he had very little real difficulty. All interested in the matter believed that he was going to allow Robert Elvin to succeed his father. If, therefore, Adam Winter declined his offer of Owley, which was the great step he designed to take—it would be handed to Robert, in whom Jacob felt complete trust. Now one decision solved the problem of Margery, if she and Adam were honest. Bullstone decided that none but Winter himself must know of the offer. Thus, if he declined it, nobody need be any the wiser, and things might take the course generally anticipated. From this point another move struck upon Jacob's mind, calculated still further to ensure secrecy so far as everybody but Adam was concerned. This came out when the men met on the evening of Joe Elvin's funeral.

Winter, his aunt and many other neighbours, including the Huxams, Jeremy and his wife, and the party from Red House, saw the dead man lowered into his grave; and by appointment on the same night, Jacob visited Shipley Farm to speak with Winter. He had determined to offer him Owley and make the way smooth; but he had also determined that the world must suppose the suggestion, if accepted, had come from Adam and not himself. He had everything at his finger ends, and had so ordered the matter that not Margery knew whither he was bound, when he left Red House after supper.

Jacob felt confident that his proposals ought to be accepted, for Owley was a far stronger and larger farm than Shipley. Its ground was richer and cleaner, its flocks had direct access to some of the finest grazing on the moor.

Moreover the house was bigger and better conditioned, while it stood nearer to Brent and the railway than Mr. Winter's present habitation.

The men sat together and Jacob wasted no time. The vital points he anticipated.

"As for rent," he said, after detailing his suggestions, "I should will that to be the same as you pay here—no more and no less. There are two conditions only: that you take on Bob Elvin, if he would like you to do so; and that you let it be understood that this suggestion came from you, not me. That may sound like craft in your ears; but the point is this: young Elvin hoped that I would trust him to carry on, and failing you, I should do so. I would, however, naturally prefer a grown and experienced man; and if you come to me and offer to go there, nobody could question my wisdom in putting you before the lad. That's all there is to it; and if you like to go over next spring, I should be glad."

Nothing but frank gratitude greeted Bullstone's offer. Adam, as the rest of the world, knew him for a man who did good things in abrupt and secret ways, and he regarded the suggestion, that he should improve his state by taking Owley, as one prompted by nothing but the good-will of the man who made it. That he should have put any other interpretation upon it was impossible. A kindly man himself, only prevented by circumstances from generosity, none could have been quicker to weigh the significance of such a handsome proposal; and when he replied, after half a minute's silence, he dwelt first on what he conceived the spirit behind Jacob's speech.

"A mighty good offer and I value it," said Winter. "I'm over and above pleased, because it shows your large heart, which didn't want showing, I'm sure, and also your opinion of me. We much like to be rated high by those we rate high ourselves; and you wouldn't have said such a thing if you hadn't felt Owley was safe with me. I'm proud of that."

"So much goes without saying, Winter. I know you'll do all that can be done and look after it well enough. Here at Shipley, it's making bricks without straw half your time—a thankless grind. You'd have an easier and fruitfuller job there."

"I know all that. I was too set on showing my pleasure to go into the thing for the minute, and if I had only myself to think on, I'd take you. But there's my aunt and brother."

"Well, they'd be a lot more comfortable than at Shipley."

"Just the opposite. You know how people fit into a place. My old woman could no more shift now than a snail out of its shell; and if Sammy thought he'd got to leave Shipley, he'd have the house out of windows and make a proper tantara. Such a thing would throw him over altogether, I reckon. It was a terrible business getting him here; but he was near twenty year younger then."

Jacob regarded him in astonishment. The objections appeared too slight to be sincere.

"Surely Samuel would soon get used to the thought," he said.

"Not him," answered Adam. "His mind—so to call it—hates change worse than anything; the leastest trifle altered makes him sulky and wicked for a month. There's a dangerous side to him none knows but me. I assure you I'm telling truth. I'd go, and mighty glad to do so; but while Samuel lives, we can't leave here."

He was so definite that argument did not suggest itself to Bullstone. His mind was soon burrowing in its accustomed channels; and, grasping the fact that his offer had been declined, he fell into gloom. He was full of suspicion at once. The reason for refusal had come so pat that it seemed as though Adam were prepared with it. Yet he submitted a most frivolous objection. Jacob had indirectly assured Winter large increase of prosperity; and was it

likely that any practical man would decline such improved conditions on the plea of discomfort for a weak-minded brother?

Bullstone began to grow fresh doubts. It was clear that Adam had no mind to go beyond the immediate radius of Red House. Meantime Winter spoke and reiterated his gratification.

"I shall always remember it," he said, "and I'd like to brag about it, if I didn't know you'd deny me. Besides you say it mustn't be known."

"To nobody," answered Jacob. "If you've turned down the offer once for all, I can only say I'm sorry and a bit surprised—especially at the reason you give. Your aunt wouldn't have made much fuss if she knew you were a gainer, and your poor brother could have been managed, as you well know how to manage him. However, you say 'no,' so Bob Elvin shall have it. But not a word about this to anybody—to anybody whatever. I'll ask you to promise that, please."

"Of course. My word's given."

"Not to any of my people either."

"I quite understand, Bullstone. And may the chance offer for me to do you a good turn. I'd be glad to get it and take it."

"As for that, you've had your chance to-night, and won't take it," answered the other, rising. He refused a drink and went his way. The night was dark and he dawdled in thought on Shipley Bridge for a few moments with the din of the river in his ear and one white streak of the fall, like a ghost, flickering up and down in the blackness of the rocks beneath. He was disappointed. A thousand doubts and dismays arose from this reverse. He worked himself into a turmoil before he reached home, and his native weakness, resolutely opposed of late, broke from restraint and moved along the old, tormenting ways. One fact dominated the situation. Winter would not go farther off, despite the immense advantages of so doing. It

followed that to remain in reality represented for him still greater privileges.

Jacob sank deeper and began to imagine maddening incidents as a result of this refusal. He saw Winter secretly relating this story to Margery. Perhaps she would laugh at it. Thus his own defeated plan liberated the old, insensate terrors and freed a force that threatened to destroy the fortifications he had lifted with such toil. The citadel was undefended again. Yet, after the first assault, he came in a measure back to his newer self and strove to convince his mind that Adam Winter had told the truth. He tried desperately hard to make himself believe it, and partially succeeded.

Life at this season demanded much attention. Special work of preparation for a big dog show was in hand and John Henry would soon leave his home for Bullstone Farm. Margery mourned the pending loss.

"The house won't be the same without him," she said. But the boy comforted her. He was full of energy and hungry to begin serious work, where some day he would reign as master.

"Don't you fret," he begged his mother. "I shall visit you of a Sunday, and I've promised grandmother to go in to chapel very regular, so we shall meet there, if not here."

They knew they would see but little of him at Red House, however, and that moved Margery to sorrow. It was the first empty place, the first nestling away. His sisters also regretted the coming change; but Peter, who had always been overshadowed by John Henry, felt no great concern. As for Jacob, he was indifferent. He knew that his son did not esteem him, for the lad's character in no way resembled his own. He was a bustling, pushing youth, steadfast and of fixed opinions—a Pulleyblank, as Mrs. Huxam delighted to point out.

Thus stress of circumstances for a time intruded; then, with more leisure, Jacob's spirit lost ground. Events aroused disquiet; paltry incidents were magnified into om-

inous evils. He sank to setting little traps for his wife, but she never fell into them. She did not even see them; but he suspected that she had seen them, and waited for her to protest and express indignation. Had she done so, he was prepared. The fact that she took no notice was set down to cunning on her part, and it wrought fresh evil within him. Thus secrecy and ignorance did their work and Margery, entirely absorbed with the preparations for her son's departure, existed unaware that her husband had returned to the darkness of his illusions. In truth she was thinking very little about him at this period. John Henry filled her thoughts.

CHAPTER XII

ON THE HILL

FOR the first time Peter Bullstone went to the great annual Cruft's International Dog Show with Barton Gill. Jacob exhibited every year, but very seldom accompanied his dogs to London; and now his son was allowed the grand experience of "Cruft's."

"You'll soon be old enough to do this work on your own," promised the boy's father, and Peter set forth, with Mr. Gill to take care, not only of him, but the six Irish terriers entered to uphold the fame of Red House.

John Henry was gone to Bullstone Farm, and home to Margery seemed very empty without him; but she often saw him and he came, at his father's direction, to Sunday dinner when he could do so.

Then happened an incident steeped in deep emotion for husband and wife. It was a quality of Jacob's failure to reason that his life, down to its most trifling incidents, suffered contamination. As existence, even to the least details, will wake the breath of creative imagination in an artist, so, where a passion has obtained complete mastery, no minute event of life but is unconsciously passed through the test of that noble, or vitiated, outlook on all things. The smallest action challenges the paramount emotion and is illuminated by that gracious, or evil, light.

Thus, when Jacob Bullstone, upon a February day, saw Adam Winter strolling up the river valley with his gun on his shoulder, the sight set fire to thought as usual; and it did more. An appetite, stilled of late under press of normal life, had quickened after its rest. An ugly idea in-

stantly moved in Bullstone's brain and he resisted it; then it returned and he attended to it. His mind worked, until presently he told himself that the inspiration, suddenly flashed to him, was good rather than evil. It sprang adult and powerful. It did not grow. He had plunged into it almost before he knew it was upon him, and he had taken the first step before considering the last. He was swept away; and in five minutes the base thing had been done, for yielding to sudden, overpowering impulse, he acted. He returned from the kennels, told Margery that Adam Winter had gone up the valley to shoot snipe, and then, after a pause, declared his intention of visiting a friend at Brent.

"I'm free for the minute and have been owing him a call for a month of Sundays," he said. "I'll be back sometime; but you needn't expect me till you see me."

He changed his coat and hat and left the house quickly; then, before reaching Shipley Bridge, he turned right-handed up the hill, skirted the copse that crowned it and plunged into the shaggy pelt of the slopes behind Red House. Hence, himself unseen, he could observe the valley beneath him and the path that passed along beside the river. He moved fast and had soon reached his destination and thrown himself into a hollow over which stood a naked thorn. Here he was invisible, while his eyes commanded the vale beneath. He could see Winter beyond the river islets and mark his fox-terrier working through the fallen brake and tangle—a white spot in the sere. Nothing else moved and he panted from his swift actions and watched the vale. Then shame rose, like a fog, and chilled the ferment of his mind. What had he done? Fired by opportunity, driven by awakened, raging lust of doubt, he had abandoned his rational purpose for the day and set another trap for Margery. What was he now doing? Having lied to her, he was spying upon her in cold blood. He revolted against the naked vileness of

such a statement and sought to clothe it in sophistry, that it should be bearable. He assured himself that he did his wife no wrong, since she was ignorant of his action and must ever remain so if innocent; while, for himself, this test, painful though it was, might prove a godsend and reassure his mind and cleanse his doubts for ever. If she did not come, a weight must roll off him and peace return; if she did come, he would see her actions and measure the significance of them. In either case he was justified. And while he argued thus, he felt the sickness of his soul. He planned to give her half an hour, then he would go on his way to Brent and do what he had promised to do. He was too far from the valley in his present watching-place and now moved down, sulking like a fox through the gullies on the hillside and keeping out of sight of any possible spectator. He proceeded a hundred yards, then found a ridge above a badger's holt—a hole between two blocks of granite that supported each other.

He reflected with his eyes on the valley and each moment heartened him. He heard Winter's gun—the faint report of two barrels fired quickly one after the other, but Adam was now out of sight. That he should in reality be shooting was a good sign. He had evidently not taken the gun as a blind, with his thoughts elsewhere. Reason strove with Bullstone. Only twenty minutes remained and then he would be gone. From beneath the river lifted its murmur in the clear cold air. The low sun had already withdrawn behind the hills and the valley lay in shadow, while the sky above it was full of light. Jacob felt the contrast between this purity and peace and his own spirit. Again and again he dragged out his watch and wished that time would hasten and liberate him. Before the end he had grown conscious of great evil within him and suffered despair under his weakness—the passing despair of a drunkard, or gambler. Then he heard a rustling and a trampling. His milch goats had wandered up a green lane in the hill, where grass extended through the banks of the

fallen bracken. There were half a dozen of them and a kid or two.

Seven minutes yet remained to complete the half hour and Bullstone was already preparing to be gone. Then he saw Margery. She entered the valley from a gate beyond the kennels and came forward. She wore a red woollen coat and a white sunbonnet. His eyes grew hot and he felt his heart beat so fast that a mist blurred the conspicuous vision below. For a few moments he lost her and rubbed his eyes. She did not reappear and he lay staring at the empty valley and hoping he had only seen a shadow conjured out of his own thoughts. Then a slight, brown figure appeared and he saw Auna running after her mother. She, too, was lost and another moment later Jacob perceived his wife ascending the hill. She lifted her voice and he understood that she was only there to call in the goats.

Thus he was thrown from one shock to another: now thankful that she did not come; now sickened before the sight of her; now again conscious that his fears were vain.

Auna caught up with her mother and he heard their voices. Then, in the gust of a great relief, he was confronted with his own position. The goats were now above him and in a few minutes Margery and his daughter would be at his elbow. Auna ready ran forward and it was too late to get away without being seen and recognised. He panted in agony, knowing what this must mean. Then he remembered that the presence of the child would at least create a respite. He turned and pretended to be examining the badger's burrow as Auna approached and saw him.

"Father!" she cried out, and then shouted to her mother. She ran into his arms, never stopping to wonder what had brought him here, and then Margery, who much wondered, joined them. She knew her husband's face exceeding well and with a sinking heart read the truth. Yet before she spoke, she strove to banish her conviction. A man might change his mind and many things were strange—even ter-

rible—until one heard the explanation which banished both mystery and fear out of them. But Jacob was not a skilled liar and he had no art to invent any plausible excuse. Indeed he hardly tried, for he knew that his wife would understand. He said something about the badger, that had killed four hens and bitten their heads off a few days before, and declared that he had found its home; Auna was well satisfied and hoped the wicked badger would be punished for his crimes; while Margery fell in with the explanation, as long as the child was with them. Indeed she said nothing and, as Auna chattered and they rounded up the goats and brought them homeward, she asked herself what she should say. She was in no hurry. She saw clearly what had tempted Jacob to spy, and she knew that he must perceive the truth was not hidden from her. And yet she argued that, perhaps, he did not know that she knew. Margery asked herself which was the better of two courses open: to inquire, as though she had forgotten his mention of Adam Winter, what had really made her husband hide on the hill, or to challenge him and reveal that she perceived he had set a trap for her and fallen into it himself.

She was silent through the candle-light hours of that evening, and still silent when Avis and Auna had gone to bed and she sat alone with her husband. There came a deep yearning for confidence, for some wise and sympathetic ear into which she might pour her tribulation. From pain she passed into anger presently, and anger determined her future action. She felt the sting of this cruelty and not guessing how opportunity had wakened Jacob's weakness, or that he had striven against a power beyond his strength to conquer, a natural indignation overwhelmed her. The futility and horror of such a life crowded down upon her soul; and it came with the more intensified forces because of late she had fancied an increase of frankness and understanding in Jacob. There had been no cloud for a long time and he had retreated less often into the obscurity and aloofness of speech and mind that told of hidden

troubles. But this outrageous act destroyed hope and swept away any belief in an increasing security. All was thrown down and the man's deed revealed to her that still he could not trust; that he was even capable of telling her a falsehood in hope to catch her doing something he thought wrong. She asked herself how often he had already done this? She guessed that the watcher, whom she had hoped was gone for ever, still spied upon her; that this was not the first time he had played with her honour thus.

Therefore anger swept her and there came a quick determination to pay her husband in his own measure heaped up. How often had he imposed a barrier of silence between them; how often had she not heard his voice addressed to her for the space of a long day? Now she would be silent; but her silence was edged with a subtler sharpness than his. He would indeed be dumb, save before the children. She was not dumb. She, instead, assumed a cheerful manner and spoke as usual of many things, only leaving the one thing untouched that she knew was tormenting his mind. She made no allusion to it and when, alone with her, he braced himself to endure her reproaches and confess his fault with penitence, the opportunity was not granted. Then he felt driven to take the first step and abase his spirit before her; but he could not and, while he turned sleepless in bed beside her, and she pretended to sleep, their secret thoughts pursued them. He began to think she was wise to abandon the incident; he praised her in his heart; he suspected that silence meant an angelic forgiveness. And then he tried to convince himself that, perhaps, after all, the matter had not deeply interested Margery; that she had not linked his return with any evil purpose, or even remembered that he had told her Winter was in the valley. He often changed his mind, as Margery knew, and though she must have guessed that the badger was an excuse, yet his real object had possibly not occurred to her at all. He longed to believe this, but his reason laughed at him. He returned, therefore, to the con-

viction that, out of her charity, she had forgiven his weakness, and he felt it would be wisest to let time pass, that her wound might heal and no more pitiful fawnings and confessions be demanded from him.

He thought to wake her and show her that he understood her nobility; but she appeared to sleep so well that he did not disturb her. And she, meantime, wondered in whom she might confide. She considered her father, but believed that he lacked the comprehension to understand; neither could she go to old Marydrew, who had wit enough, but was Jacob's own nearest friend. Jeremy was too young. Then she determined to tell her mother.

Her resolution did not weaken with morning, and still Jacob could not find it in him to speak. The emotional conclusion of the previous night remained, while the emotion itself was gone. His customary reserve and love of silence woke with him, and it occurred to him that Margery might, after all, intend to speak in her own time. Therefore he kept silence. She only told him, however, that she was going into Brent, with Auna, to see her mother, who suffered from a cold and kept her bedroom; and after dinner on that day Margery set out with her younger daughter.

Bullstone walked to Shipley Bridge with them, then still farther, to the cottage of Billy Marydrew; and there he took leave of them and entered.

Margery proceeded, wondering curiously if Jacob shared her intense desire for the opinion of a third person, whether, indeed, he had not already poured his terrors into some other heart. A woman certainly never had won his troubles; he hardly knew half a dozen; but it might be that he confided in William Marydrew. She was silent as they tramped the leafless lanes to Brent, reached Aish upon the hillside, descended over Lydia Bridge to the town. Here she and Auna parted; her daughter went straight to the Huxams, and Margery turned into her brother's shop.

Jeremy stood behind the counter and revealed a gloomy

mood. He was the father of two children now, and the second proved to be delicate.

Unaware of his depression, Margery praised the shop window and the general air of prosperity which her brother had created.

"It's wonderful how you've got on," she said; "a born shopkeeper, as mother always told us."

"Yes, that's true enough," he admitted, "but I'm afraid I'm reaching my tether here. Flesh and blood can only stand a certain amount, and to live with what you hate is a fearful strain. In fact to spend all my life in an odour of fruit and vegetables and never escape from it, is beginning to age me a good bit."

"What does the smell matter, if you're making and saving money?"

"It matters to my nerves," explained Jeremy. "I've reached a pitch of proper loathing now against the contents of this shop, and nothing but a sense of duty keeps me here. I've got to go on with it, I suppose, though at a cost none will ever know; but if people, who are supposed to care about me, only realised how I hate the very touch of fruit, they might combine and give a thought to the situation."

"What would you like to sell?" she asked.

"Nothing you can eat," answered Jeremy. "I'll never handle food again if I once escape this heavy cross. I'd sooner live my life among coal-scuttles and dust-bins than with food—especially fruit and vegetables. Never again in my born days shall I touch a fruit. If I could go into dry goods to-morrow, there's no doubt I should thank God; so would Jane for my sake. However, while the business sticks to me, no doubt I shall be expected to stick to it—sickening though it is."

"A pity you didn't go into mother's haberdashery."

"A very great pity," answered her brother. "When the assistant was away, you'll remember I did lend mother a hand, while Jane looked after this show; and the relief

—to move among materials and refined things, like gloves and ties and so on, and everything clean and scentless! However, life's life; I must bite on the bullet and endure as long as my nature will let me."

"I'm afraid that won't be long," she answered, "for once you get out of heart about a thing, it's soon 'good-bye.'"

"I had it in my mind to ask Jacob for some advice," replied Jeremy. "I've got a very great respect for his judgment as you know, and though I'd not care to put myself under an obligation to many men, I wouldn't object at all in his case. He did me one very good turn, and though, as a huckster, I failed in the long run, if he had some other equally brilliant idea up his sleeve, it might be just the one thing my nature craves."

Margery threw out not much hope, but promised to speak to Jacob.

"I'm sure he'd help you, or any of us, if he could. His one pleasure in life is helping people. All the same he won't be able to understand your point of view this time."

"Not only point of view, but smell and touch," explained Jeremy. "Let him ask himself what he'd feel if his dogs were swept away and he had to live with nought but a parcel of cats. Then he'll see what I'm feeling. Tell him I want to get away from the fruits of the earth, and never wish to see one of them again; and I'd sacrifice a lot to do so, and so would Jane."

She left him then and proceeded to her mother's. She felt disturbed that Jeremy should have failed once more. But she smiled to hear him talk of 'biting on the bullet.'

"I know what that means better than ever he will," thought she.

Then Margery reflected concerning her own purpose, and, having already determined to speak to her mother, now asked herself what she should say. When it became a question of spoken words the difficulty appeared, for she was no longer in the temper to experiment with any words

at all. Her mood had changed from anger to melancholy; she weighed her proposed speech and doubted whether, after all, Mrs. Huxam had better hear it. Something suddenly and forcibly told her that her mother would not be vague or neutral in such a matter. To confess to Judith would certainly entail following her mother's subsequent directions, and Margery much doubted what they might be. She was still divided in mind when she joined Mrs. Huxam.

The elder sat by a fire in her bedroom, with a shawl wrapped round her head. From its whiteness her face peered, also pale. Her eyes were heavy and her breathing disordered, but she was wide awake listening to Auna, who read the Bible and laboured diligently for her grandmother with the Second Book of Kings.

" 'And Jehoash did that which was right in the sight of the Lord all his days——' " piped Auna; then she broke off and beamed.

"Oh, granny, isn't it a blessing to find somebody who did right before the Lord—for a change?"

"It is," croaked the old woman. "Few ever did and few ever will."

Auna, liberated from her record of faulty monarchs, left Margery with Mrs. Huxam and joined a young woman who operated in the post-office below.

"It's on your chest, I'm afraid," said Judith's daughter.

"I'm better, however. I shall be down house in a couple of days."

"Take care of the draughts then. February's always your bad month."

"No month is worse than another if you trust the Almighty," answered Mrs. Huxam. "How's your husband?"

"Jacob's all right."

"No, he isn't all right, and he never will be while he holds off his Sunday duty. With them who keep live animals, Sunday has got to be broke in a manner of speaking; but he ought not to let the dogs come between him and public worship, and well he knows it."

"It isn't the dogs. He hates a crowd," said Margery.

"Then he's all too like to spend eternity in one. Yes, Margery, I wish very much indeed I could feel more content about Bullstone's future."

In the light of these serious words, Jacob's wife felt little disposed to set out of her own sorrows. Indeed they were forgotten, since her instinct was instantly to respond to the challenge.

"He's always doing good things."

"So you may think, and so may he think; but if your Light is uncertain, what looks good may be in truth be bad. There's a lot done that shallow minds applaud for virtue, when the truth is the motive is wrong and the deed worthless, if not evil. And be that as it may, we well know that works without faith are of no account."

Margery changed the subject, yet introduced another that could not but redound to her husband's credit.

"The foundations of the house are dug I hear, mother."

"They are. The villa residence will begin to come into a fact as soon as we can trust the weather. We shall want your help in the garden, for we don't know anything about flowers."

"I shall dearly like to help. I long to see you really resting at last."

"I am content to let it be as it will, knowing that what happens is right. I wonder sometimes what the Lord will find for my hands to do when we retire; because, though we speak of retiring, that's no word for a Christian mouth really. The Christian never retires."

"No, you'll never retire from doing good and helping the people to do good—I'm sure of that. Has Jeremy told you of his troubles?"

"Me first, of course. I'm weighing them. I've laid them before the Throne. With Jeremy one has to remember that he was made, by his Creator's wish and will, a little different from everyday men. He's got great gifts, and though one could wish he'd been a Pulleyblank, even to wish

it is wrong. When he was here for a bit, while Miss Mason went into a nursing home, Jeremy delighted me. He belongs to the old generation of shop people and has got the touch—hands like a woman and a great power of letting a customer think he's having his own way, when in reality he is not."

"He hates the green stuff and fruit."

"He feels that he was intended for higher lines."

"I'm going to ask Jacob about him. Jacob would like to pleasure him again if he could."

"I hope so, I'm sure, Jeremy being your brother and my son. But I've got my ideas in that matter. Now you'd best to go home. The dark's coming down and I've talked enough."

"Would you like some of our goats' milk? It's wonderful rich in cream. It's often done me good."

"Yes," said Mrs. Huxam. "I should like some of your goats' milk, if you can spare it."

Margery and Auna set out for home, the child richer by a shilling from her grandfather.

"I cheered him up about grandmother," she said, "because if she was very ill, she wouldn't have been so interested in the Kings of Israel, would she?"

Her mother speculated with amusement on Mrs. Huxam's view of Jeremy's character, and thought how Judith must have regarded such a spirit in another man. She was in a good temper and glad that she had not grumbled. Her nature was built to bend before the blast and she was always quick to react to any improvement in her circumstances. She considered, whether, after all, it might not be better to speak of the recent past to Jacob himself, and resolved that she would be guided by his future attitude. If he remained under the cloud, she would endeavour to dispel it; but she trusted that in a few days he might emerge.

They brought good news, for Auna now produced in triumph a telegram which Barlow Huxam himself had taken

off the wires and entrusted to her, while Margery was with her mother. The child had not told Margery, but now produced the treasure for her father.

The Red House terriers had taken two first prizes. Auna begged to be allowed to keep the telegram and add it to her treasures.

"It will be the greatest of all," she said, "and it's signed 'Peter,' so it must be true."

Spew: liquorice & water,

from spec.

CHAPTER XIII

THE ORANGES

BULLSTONE'S monument of madness was nearly completed.

One day he met Adam Winter talking to Margery and Avis, as he returned from Owley Farm to dinner, and anon, in the kennels, Avis asked the meaning of words that Mr. Winter had spoken to her mother.

"He said some people have to take their pleasure like a dog snatches a bone—with an eye on the whip—father. What's that signify?"

"Who was he speaking about?"

"I don't know. He said it to mother, and she laughed and told him that pleasure took that way would be half pain."

"It means—it means—nothing at all. Just a way of speaking. Hungry dogs will steal bones—and whips will find 'em, soon or late. And all pleasure's half pain when you grow up. The thing is to be young, like you, Avis. Then pleasure's real I hope."

"Would you like for me to marry Bob Elvin, father?"

"Would you like to?"

"He asked me last Sunday going to chapel, and I said I would; and he's coming next Sunday to beg we may be tokened."

An idea so great had occupied Jacob's mind fully enough at another moment. But now there was no room for it.

"I knew he was going to, yet didn't think he'd have the cheek for another year."

"I love him with all my heart, and grandmother thinks he's a very good, proper-minded young man. She's agreeable; but she says it mustn't be for a full year, till I'm over eighteen."

"Quite right. I'll talk to Master Bob next Sunday."

"Are you vexed, or pleased about it?"

"Why, I'm both, my dear. Vexed to think how the time flies—vexed in a sort of way to find you're wife-old. Yet that's foolishness, isn't it? And pleased that you've fallen in love with an honest, hard-working man."

"You won't dress him down, or say he's looked above him, or anything like that?"

"I don't know what I'll say. Certainly not that. Run in now. You've given me something to think about."

"Mother likes Bob very much indeed."

"I don't know anybody that hasn't a good word for him."

"And I'm well thought upon too, father."

"Why not, Avis; why not?"

"Nothing can ever come between me and Bob," she said, then left him, and he forgot her instantly.

His thoughts drifted through the familiar channels and he read pregnant and personal things into Winter's jest. He began at the old starting point, strove to bring a judicial mind to bear upon the question, asked himself, for the thousandth time, if he had ever found a cause to suspect any man but this man, or associate with Margery the name of another. He remembered that with some exceptions, now faint in vanished years, he had never done so. Once or twice during their early married days, a dog-fancier had spoken to Margery in words too free and easy for his taste; but no man remained in their united lives save Winter. His wife was not a woman who particularly enjoyed male society, or strove to challenge the other sex. So far as he knew, her acquaintance did not number a dozen men of her own generation.

To this fact he always returned, and it increased rather

than abated his tribulation. He told himself, falsely, that had she appreciated male society and been at her best and happiest in it, innocence would be far easier to assume; he assured himself that he would not have minded that. But there was only one who could not be shut out of her life and who, despite handsome inducement to do so, would not go out of it.

The words overheard by Avis might mean much; and even more importance he attached to Margery's answer. A woman who was doing wrong with her eyes open, and suffering accordingly, was just the woman to have replied so.

He worked himself into a fever and fell upon days of gloom darker than the weather.

Accidents contrived to throw Shipley Farm much into his thoughts, for illness fell upon it. An epidemic that was filling half the homes of Brent with sickness reached the vale, and first Amelia was stricken down, then her younger nephew. Both were seriously ill for a time and the old woman's life became endangered. The parish nurse was too fully occupied to assist them, and since neither could be moved, it became a needful charity that their neighbours lent necessary aid. Samuel Winter tended his brother, while a cousin—one of the nurses from the Asylum not far distant—obtained leave to wait on Amelia. The old woman survived, but was kept in her chamber for some weeks. Then the nurse left again and Avis and Auna were glad to be of daily service. Adam also began to recover. Margery, however, so far as her husband knew, had not visited Shipley Farm during the progress of this misfortune. He neither forbade her to do so, nor commented on the fact that she kept away, though, according to his custom, he weighed its significance and now felt glad and now read more into it than appeared.

Of late he had sometimes struggled from his torment by the road of preoccupation, and striven to busy himself for other people. Opportunity did not lack, for the winter

was long and hard, and there came a day when, out of goodwill alone, he set off to visit an old man—a friend of his dead father—who lived at Totnes and was reported in the extremity of need. Only the workhouse waited for him, nor did Bullstone know any means to avert this doom, since the ancient soul lived on after the world could offer no other place for him; but Jacob departed to inquire if anything might be done, and it was understood that he would stop at Brent on returning from Totnes, sup with his father-in-law, who desired to speak with him, and return at a late hour to Red House.

The day was overclouded from the north and snow promised to fall ere long. Those who best understood the signs prophesied a stern spell, for frost had hardened the ground and the temperature kept very low. At noon the sun sometimes moistened the ice and thawed a little of the mud; then the frost returned as the light failed. Fruit-growers welcomed the cold to hold back bud; but farmers, now beginning to expect their lambs, desired it not. As for Jacob, the weather braced him physically. He set off, took train to Totnes and presently found himself anticipated. The old man whom he had gone to cheer was stricken with illness and already comatose. He did not recognise Bullstone, and his visitor, glad rather than sorry that death had come to the rescue, retraced his way, being informed that money could not add to the dying man's comfort, or prolong his life.

Having heard that oranges were a valuable fruit against the epidemic, he thought to take a dozen home and leave them at Shipley Farm. He debated this problem in the train on the way back to Brent, and argued long with himself as to the propriety of such a step. He found himself uncertain, yet the idea had thrust into his mind and he hesitated to dismiss it. He regretted having thought of it; then he grew impatient with himself and determined to follow the impulse. He told himself that, whatever value might be set upon his gift, his motive was one of pure

kindness. Then he pictured Winter receiving the oranges and perhaps laughing in secret as he accepted them. Once more he determined not to take them; but pursued the subject, in his laborious fashion that ever magnified trifles, and again decided that he would do so. It was typical of his mind, at this season, that already it began to lose sense of proportion; and while he exaggerated every incident involving the inhabitants of Shipley Farm, upon other far more momentous matters, he decided instantly and not seldom more swiftly than sound judgment had warranted. He was impetuous when he might reasonably delay, and where no question really existed and the problem's solution mattered nothing, he would fret and exhaust himself.

On reaching Brent he entered the shop of Jeremy Huxam to make his purchase. Jane was serving, but called Jeremy as his brother-in-law appeared. Then she put the oranges into a bag, took the money for them and left her husband with Jacob.

"I haven't forgot you are wishful to drop this," said the elder; "but shops are not in my line as you know, and it's a pity, if you ask me, that you can't stomach this work, especially as you've done so well at it."

"I'm not going to throw up the sponge, be sure," promised Jeremy. "I shall fight on till the right occupation offers. But, if the inner nature turns and the gorge rises, then you may be sure you're not doing the work you were planned to do. However, I shall come to it. I always trust the future and I always trust my fellow-man. I've been a square peg in a round hole all my life, Jacob; but after such an apprenticeship, I feel tolerable sure that the next billet will be the chosen one. Jane and I have shone through a fog ever since we have been married you may say; but fog or not, we have shown our light and done our best, and my mother is as certain as I am myself that my gifts are only kept back."

"Haberdashery you're craving for, so Margery tells me."

"My natural bent I believe to be there," admitted Jeremy.

"Then look ahead and keep your mouth shut," advised his brother-in-law, who could see farther into the fortunes of other men than his own.

"Stop where you are," he continued, "and leave the future to time. I should have thought you could see that the big chance is coming for yourself without any help."

"You're a deep one," murmured Jeremy, "and what you see was also seen by another good friend—the best I've got in the world. I mean Jane, of course. She hinted in secret that when father and mother retire, it would be in the course of nature for me to go to the post-office and take on the shop. But they haven't mentioned it and I'm far too delicate minded to do so. Not that I couldn't rise to the post-office as well as the business—I could; but I mustn't touch such a great subject yet."

"You needn't touch it. But stop whining over the smell of green stuff, and keep a stiff upper lip, and show yourself a good man of business and keen and capable at figures and so on. Then your parents will come to see for themselves you can fill their shoes presently, and very likely invite you to get well into the saddle with their help before they go. Jane's trustworthy and clever, and you're the prime favourite with your mother. She's a human being where you're concerned, and you know you'll win her right enough. And your father would far sooner pass the business over to you, and keep his hand on it, than sell."

Jeremy brightened.

"He would, because then his occupation wouldn't be exactly gone, would it? He'd look after me, and it would take a considerable amount of his time, I dare say."

Then he praised Jacob.

"You've got a business head without a doubt," he declared. "It's a great thing to have an eye that pierces the future like yours. I have the habit of looking ahead also, but my future's never too clear to me. However,

I've got undying hope. I beat you there. And if the chance offers with father some day, you might sound him—just in a vague and delicate way. It's high politics and I wouldn't trust myself, nor yet Jane, to breathe it. But it might very well come from you, I dare say. See what Margery thinks; I know my good's hers."

Bullstone restrained a contempt for his brother-in-law, which he had always found compatible with good-natured regard, and promised to hold the matter in mind.

"I'm supping with them to-night by appointment," he said, "and I'll get over there now, for the governor wants to see me; but I shan't mention these high matters yet a while; and meantime you put a good face on your oranges and lemons and show yourself a little sharper at pounds, shillings and pence."

Then he took his bag of fruit and went his way. Dusk had come down and only a golden eye or two from some small shop window shot the gloaming. It was nearly dark at six o'clock, and though no flake had fallen, the air already to Jacob's nose seemed to smell of snow.

Mr. Huxam was out when he reached the post-office and from a remark that related to the far past, Jacob plunged into deep waters. His mood was amiable, but, as often happened with his mother-in-law, from whom the passing years separated him more and more widely in opinion, conversation tended to exasperate him and run him into extremes of statement he would not have uttered in a calm moment.

On this occasion, he had himself to thank and, looking back afterwards, perceived the tremendous significance of that encounter.

There had died a man concerning whom few good things could be said. Marsden Blake, a landowner of wealth and position, who succeeded his father as lord of Brent manor, had been killed while shooting big game in Africa.

For the Huxams the tragedy possessed some interest, since it was this man whom their eldest son had died to save

nearly twenty years ago. As a boy he had stopped Blake's runaway horse and preserved the young man's life together with his companion's; but he had lost his own in so doing.

Jacob reminded Judith of the fact and how she had told him that Providence had permitted the death of Thomas Huxam for a good end, destined some day to appear.

"What d'you think of that matter now?" he asked. "Are you going to say that Blake wouldn't have been better dead and your son better living? What's Blake's record? A wife that died of a broken heart, a wasted estate, gambling, wrong-doing and now dead—smashed to rags and bones by a rhinoceros on the Zambesi."

"Yes, and what's my son's record? What do you suppose he's been doing these twenty years? Better work—far better work than even he could have done on earth. He went, because he was ripe to go; and as for the other, he had his chance, as the worst have, but his end was pre-ordained. If there'd been good hidden under his evil, then, when a young saint died to save him, he would have seen the Light, like Paul, and understood his Maker's mercy and turned to the Cross. But he was lost from the womb, and the one good thing you can say about him is this: that the Lord used him as a tool in the matter of Thomas—not Thomas in the matter of him as I thought at the time."

"A funny tool—a drunken, dissolute sweep like that to blot out your fine boy."

"God uses strange weapons—strange in our eyes, yet always perfect for His purpose."

History repeats itself and Jacob answered in a phrase of Xenophanes, though of that sage he had certainly never heard. But thoughts of men echo and re-echo down the centuries, as conditions are iterated by the reverberation of history.

"Doubt is extending over everything," he said, "and you stand for a sort of faith we seldom see, mother. In

my young days we spoke with a good deal more certainty than our children do; but all institutions are weaker than of old. The Law's weaker, the Church is weaker, faith is weaker. There's a spirit abroad to run black into white and turn everything grey. Bad men ain't hung like they used to be, but wrangled over and often let off for false pity; sermons ain't preached like I used to hear. Everything's toned down and softened, and modern parsons will go through their discourse without daring to name hell."

"How d'you know that, since you never go to church?" asked Mrs. Huxam.

"My neighbours tell me. I hear about the changes from my friend, William Marydrew,—a great church-goer and very keen in his intellects, for all his years. He says that in the old days the clergy used to thunder and flash the Word down, like lightning, on the people; but now they argue and palter and mark time, so that folk go out of church as doubtful as when they went in. It's all education, and men's brains getting larger and their sense of justice increasing."

"Don't you think it," answered Judith. "Their brains will land mankind in the madhouse at the rate we're going in some directions. Are right and wrong other than right and wrong because godless men; for their own base ends, try to mix 'em?"

"I don't know; but I do know that a good deal of the world's work is standing still thanks to education. Labour has got such a lot to talk about nowadays, that it spends half its time chattering; and the money is always the subject nowadays, never the work that's supposed to earn it."

"Weak faith is the sin at the back of all our troubles; and the world's pretty ripe for the avenging Hand so far as the faithful can see," she answered.

"I don't believe that. Laws are made for the living, not the dead. We labour too much under—not the avenging Hand, but the dead Hand. Everything changes, including our standards of faith and duty. I heard a chap say last

week—a sober, decent man too—that life was quite difficult enough without being handicapped by the Ten Commandments. Of course he was joking, but you see the point.”

Mrs. Huxam did not see the point. She retorted sternly and told Jacob that he was little better than an atheist to question the enduring quality of inspiration.

“It’s all of a piece,” she continued. “Man is losing sight of his Maker at every turn in the road. We talk of Anti-Christ and don’t see that Anti-Christ is already among us, netting souls by the hundred thousand. The abiding consciousness of the Divine Presence is lost—gone. This generation hardly knows the meaning of the words. And what follows? The men and women are false in wedlock, false in fatherhood and motherhood, false in business and false in faith. There are new, sham gods being lifted up, and you—you, my daughter’s husband—are worshipping ’em with the rest. You pretend it isn’t so; but your words condemn you.”

Jacob laughed, for he had thought long upon these things and slipped farther from his old guides than Mrs. Huxam knew.

“‘Consciousness of the Divine Presence’ a guarantee for honesty in business!” he answered. “Why, my dear woman, it isn’t even a guarantee for honesty in the pulpit! How many of the parsons are honest, or dare to say what they know is the truth? And we laymen—look round. Take Ireland—two camps of men fighting like devils, with ‘consciousness of the Divine Presence’ the bedrock of all their quarrels. And our so-called Christian Government—what would become of that, if, for one sitting of Parliament, it put ‘the Divine Presence’ before practical politics and diplomacy? No, no; ‘consciousness of the Divine Presence’ don’t make men honest, I assure you, mother—not even such as say they believe in it.”

She glared at him and turned very white.

“God help your wife and children then,” she said. “If I

had known you hid such poison as this in you, I'd sooner have seen Margery in her coffin than——”

Barlow Huxam came in and his wife left her sentence unfinished.

“We've all got a right to our opinions. Our conduct, not our words, will judge us, mother.”

“Another lie,” she answered, and rose and left them.

Jacob expressed regrets and hoped that Barlow would make his peace.

“I let my tongue run,” he confessed, “but I didn't mean to vex her.”

Mr. Huxam, however, when he heard particulars, took rather a serious view of the controversy.

“I'm sorry you touched religion,” he declared, “because on that subject Judy's—however, I'll explain you were not in earnest and are properly contrite. But don't you put loose opinions into your children, because, if she caught a doubtful word in their mouths, there'd be a flare-up and harm done beyond mending.”

“Their mother teaches them, not me. Anna's the only one who sets any value on me,” answered Jacob.

Mr. Huxam brought out the plans of the villa residence.

“I'm wishful for you to see the creation of the house,” he said. “Young Tremayne, of Exeter, drew it and I think well of it. I was hoping that you'd persuade Judy about the bath-room; but your light's out with her to-night I'm afraid. She says the Pulleyblanks, and the Twelve Apostles, and a lot more celebrated people never had a bath-room, and therefore it's a vanity and vexation. But I argue that such an invention stands well inside Christianity, for there's no word against cleaning yourself in style and comfort. The world won't stand still.”

“That's what your wife is so angry about,” answered Jacob. “She thinks that if your faith is sound, you ought to stand still, no matter what cry goes up to get a move on and take the iron hand of worn-out uses off the people.

We rot under festering laws that the Church won't lift, for faith, and the State won't touch, for dirty policy. You stand out for your bath-room."

"It's part of every modern villa residence and must go in I reckon; though whether I shall have the pluck to use it, time will show. Judy would expect me to be struck dead by lightning—still the opportunity may come, and the younger generation will prove there's no danger. That's one thing education have done anyway—the people wash a lot more than in my youth; but Judy always says it's too fatal easy to cleanse the outside of the platter."

Bullstone praised the plans of the house and looked forward to visiting the site at a later date.

"There'll be no building for a minute," he said, "for we're in for a real pinch of winter. However, I'm never feared of February cold."

"The snow has begun," answered Barlow.

"Then I'll get home and not sup with you—for that reason and another. I mustn't anger Mrs. Huxam any more to-day. Better you tell her I've gone home, with my tail between my legs; but hope to make my peace next time we meet."

"That's wisest," admitted his father-in-law. "I'll say you're terrible chapfallen and didn't mean a word of it—just some nonsense you heard in the train—eh? All well at Red House?"

"All well, and my father's old friend at Totnes is fast going home—didn't know me."

"All well with him then."

Jacob left the post-office without seeing his mother-in-law again. He did not much regret hurting her, for he felt that her attitude to life was obsolete, and he had no wish that his children should grow up self-righteous and bigoted. He was in a good temper when he set out and saw flakes of snow drift past the oil lamps that lit the town-ship. They fell fitfully as yet, but grew thicker as he climbed the hill and set his face northerly for home. He

was comfortable and warm, for he had drunk before leaving Brent. His old teetotal habit had been of late years abandoned and he took spirits after his day's work. The night was very dark and he felt glad to have escaped supper at Brent. The Red House supper was taken about nine o'clock, and he would now be home before that hour.

At Shipley he turned into the farm gate, where a powder of snow already whitened the earth. No light shone from the ground floor of the farmhouse, but a dull red glow outlined one bedroom window, while the others remained in darkness. The door was closed, but knowing that Miss Winter still kept her room and slept much, Jacob did not knock. Instead he lifted the latch quietly and entered the kitchen, which opened down a passage-way behind the parlour. The place was empty. A candle burned low on the table and beside it stood a jelly in a pudding basin. A peat fire was sinking on the hearth. Bullstone set down his oranges, and proceeded to leave as quietly as he had come. He was already in the stone-paved passage at the foot of a little stair, when voices from above arrested him.

He heard his wife and Adam Winter. Each spoke once, and in the silence he marked every syllable.

"Quick—quick—there's a dear," exclaimed the woman.

"Come, then—come," said the man.

Then he heard Margery laugh.

Within five seconds the thing had happened, and for another five he stood without moving, without breathing. Then he turned to rush up the stairs; but he did not. There was no need for that. In another five seconds he had left the house, closing the door behind him. It was over—the long-drawn agony had ended and he stood justified in all his woes. At last the truth stared at him without one shadow to make doubtful its hideous face. He leapt to accept it. An indefinite relief settled upon him as he went panting home, for he could now make peace with his own soul. Already he had planned the future. He was amazed to find how his mind worked. He marshalled

his thoughts coherently and vividly. He swept over many subjects—the children, their future, the new order of events at Red House, when his wife was gone and the place emptied of her for ever. Then only would his own heart and conscience become pure again and the muddy currents of life run clear. The dominant emotion at this moment was one of thankfulness that he had been right, for the possibility that he could still be wrong had ceased to exist and immeasurable relief attended its departure.

The children were surprised to see him and when he asked Auna for her mother, the child said that she had gone to Shipley with something for Miss Winter. He ascended to his room, to change his coat and looked at his watch. It was nine o'clock, and at ten minutes past nine, Margery returned with her shawl over her head.

She was flushed and panting.

"I've had such a run in the snow," he heard her say to Avis.

And the girl answered:

"Father's home."

She came to him then, at the table, sharpening the carving knife on the steel before he cut a piece of cold pork.

"My, Jacob! Back to supper? Nothing's amiss? I've been to Shipley with a bowl of nice stock for Miss Winter. She don't pick up. It's her age against her."

He did not answer, and Margery took her place at the bottom of the table. Her husband preserved silence, nor did he reply to Barton Gill, when the old man spoke.

The children lowered their voices and looked sideways at him. Margery, who had come straight home and not returned in to the Shipley house-place, was ignorant that he had been there and left the oranges upon the table. She, too, fell very quiet and knew that she had gravely angered him by going to the Winters. She doubted not that he had set another trap for her; and this time he would think that he had caught her. She was not frightened but sorry. She had her emotion, however, ignored

Jacob and talked to the others. Then, the meal ended, Bullstone left the kitchen and ascended to the little room in the upper floor, where he kept his papers and books. He did not reappear until Avis, Auna and Peter had gone to bed. Gill, who slept over the kennels, had already retired. Then he came back into the kitchen to get a day book.

"Wait, wait, Jacob," begged Margery. "Do, my dear man, keep your anger for me and not frighten the children with it. Auna's gone crying to bed and the others are cowed and full of fear. It's too bad. What have I done, after all? Visited a sick old woman with a basin of jelly. Is that enough to——?"

"No more," he said slowly. "I know what you've done—what you've done often enough before. It's ended now. All's over between us and I'm not going to talk; I'm going to act. And may the Almighty in Heaven strike me dumb where I stand, if you shall ever hear my voice again after this hour. I could kill you and I could kill him—I could have killed you together just now. But there's others to think about. My children are mine, so I believe."

"What are you saying?" she cried.

"You've heard my voice for the last time," he answered and left her.

He locked the front door; then he went up to his work-room and the place was silent. Only the house crickets chirruped and the fire rustled. Margery sat for an hour looking straight before her. What did he suppose had happened? What was he going to do? What could he do? Something awful had overtaken him; some evil things had come to his ears. It was impossible that her trivial act behind his back could have awakened passion so deep as this. She had not hidden the visit to Shipley. The children knew where she had gone and might have told him if she had not. His awful treats terrified her. He had said all was over between them and that she should never hear his voice again. He had accused her of adultery and declared that he might have killed her. She was very

frightened now and feared for his reason. She blamed herself bitterly for going to Shipley and vowed never to err again. In this mood she persisted for some time, then it passed and she banished the fear that he was mad and grew angry at his insufferable insults. She pictured life without him, and without the eternal threat that sulked in his eyes. Then she considered her children and his. She flamed with fierce indignation at his allusion to them. 'My children are mine, so I believe.' And he had sworn before God that these should be the last words he would ever speak to her. But from anger she quickly returned to terror. He must be mad thus to attack her, and she, no doubt, had innocently helped to drive him mad. Her soul sickened at the thought of the long hours yet to pass before the morning. She fell into tears and abandoned herself to a frenzy of weeping.

He made no sign and presently she dried her face and determined to approach him. If he was mad, then it became her to treat him as a sick man, forget her own suffering and do all in her power to soothe his temper. It was past twelve o'clock when she went upstairs and saw a light under the door of his little room. She nerved herself to enter and turned the handle of the door; but it was locked.

She spoke low—not to wake the children who slept close at hand:

"Jacob—forgive me. I'm cruel sorry. Hear me—only hear me—there's a dear."

And he, sitting writing within, listened to the last three coaxing words as though they had been red-hot stabs through his head. For they were an echo.

He did not reply, and a hideous fear touched Margery that he might have destroyed himself—that that was his meaning, when he said she should never hear his voice again.

"For Christ's sake, Jacob——"

But there came no response and she went down again to the kitchen. The iron of the stove was giving fitful sounds

that told of cooling; the fire had sunk. She looked out, to see that the snow had ceased to fall and stars shone through thin clouds. The crickets had left off chirruping and night hung dead and heavy. She huddled up in front of the fire and her terror increased. Then that happened to lessen it. She heard her husband push back his chair and move.

Once more, an hour later, she ascended, knocked at his door and spoke to him; but he did not reply.

“May I be judged by my fellow-creatures and condemned if I have ever done you wrong in word or thought or deed, Jacob,” she said at last. Still he made no answer and she went downstairs again. He had heard and reflected how soon that would happen she professed to desire. Her fellow-creatures should judge between them quickly enough.

At two o’clock she put out the lamp, lighted a candle and went to her bedroom. She crept up very quietly, so that he should not hear her; but listened again at his door. He was breathing heavily and muttering in his dreams. She had heard his voice again; but it sounded strange and far off, touched to an unfamiliar tone, as sleeping voices are.

She put out her candle and looked in upon her children. Avis and Auna were both in deep slumber. They had pulled up their blind, as they were wont to do and put out a saucer of milk and jam, to freeze and make a dainty for the morning. Peter’s room was on the other side of the passage. He, too, slept soundly with a book beside him. She entered her own room shivering with the cold and feeling physically hungry. But she did not descend again. She went to bed and shivered still, missing the great, sanguine body that was wont to keep her slight figure warm.

Again she cried till her pillow was wet and cold, and she longed that when she slept she might never wake again.

Dawn was grey and the hour for rising had come before she grew unconscious.

CHAPTER XIV

END OF A HOME

THAT night, while Margery had sat below and from time to time strove to reach him, Jacob Bullstone occupied many hours with writing. He had set down the web of testimony woven over many years—the long horror of suspicion, now culminated in proof irrefragable. Scene by scene, incident by incident, his remorseless memory gathered every thread of the pitiful fabric. It seemed that a stage was lighted within his brain, whereon act succeeded after act of his married life. It did not surprise him that the narrative presented itself in such orderly sequence, for all had long been printed upon the pages of his mind, and, looking back, one fact alone astonished him: that he should have patiently endured his dishonour until the final climax. From his own standpoint, the account, as he set it down, appeared lucid and trustworthy. A stranger, reading it without bias or other knowledge, had been convinced of its reality. By a thousand touches truth seemed to stand confessed. That another story as good, in contravention of Bullstone's statement, could be created out of the same material he did not imagine. Jacob wrote quite calmly, only holding his pen when his wife came, to break the silence with entreaty. Then after she had gone he proceeded, and not until the work was done did nature demand rest. He fell asleep, indeed, a few moments after he had ceased to write. The compilation acted like an anodyne; the mechanical work of setting all down calmed him; and at the finish he lay back in his chair and slumbered heavily.

At dawn he awoke, and about the hour when Margery began to sleep, he rose, made a packet of his papers, put on his coat and boots and went downstairs. It was too early to pursue his purpose, but he would not loiter and, as the maid appeared to open the house and light the fire, Jacob set out for Brent, leaving no message behind him. Not much snow had fallen and the sky was white and clear.

He began to collect his thoughts and found that they persistently ran on into the future, after what he now planned to do should be done. He was busy thus when an incident brought him back to the present and loosened passion.

Adam Winter was astir, sweeping the snow away from his outer gate. He saw Bullstone, flung down his broom and came out to intercept him.

His smiling face sent the blood through the other's head and Jacob trembled with rage as the smaller man came to him.

"Got to thank you for thicky, brave fruit last night I expect. Like you to leave it and——"

The other roared:

"It's over—it's done, you God damned scoundrel—all's done—all's known!"

Adam stared, and then a heavy fist smashed into his face and Jacob's other hand was swung to the side of his head.

He reeled; his hat flew off; half blind and groping, with his arms thrust before him, he fell. He lifted himself to his knees, but dropped again, giddy and scarcely conscious. He supposed that he confronted a madman, for there existed no shadow of meaning to him in this assault. He had once or twice seen his brother suffer from like paroxysms.

"Man, man, that's bad," he said gently, with one hand to his head, the other supporting him. "That's a wicked thing to do, master, and you'll be sorry for it."

Bullstone was gone. His fury sped him on his way, and not until he had breasted a hill did he slow down and his mind grow calmer. For some time he rejoiced at what

he had done; then he began to be sorry for it. Often enough he had been tempted to physical violence against Winter; once or twice he had felt a gathering lust to do violence to Margery; but he had escaped the peril until this moment. Now ill chance had thrust his enemy upon him at an hour when self-control was impossible. As the sun rose he mourned his act, not for itself, but because it was a mean thing to smite a man just recovered from sickness—a blot on the large, inexorable plan now waiting accomplishment. He had succumbed to Nature, after successfully fighting her for so long. That any fellow-creature would blame him—that any husband would have thought the worse of him for killing Winter with his hands—he did not for a moment imagine; but his act stood out of harmony with the long story of his patience and restraint. It was beneath his character and reputation. He remembered an ancestor who had taken the law into his own hands and destroyed both the man and wife who dishonoured him. That was a deed orbicular, complete and tremendous; but he dreamed of no such course. He had sunk from his own high standards and regretted it.

Then he dismissed Winter and returned again to all that was going to happen when the Law had freed him. He meant to divorce his wife and begin a new existence; but he did not mean that the end of his days should be ruined and his destiny changed by tribulation forced upon him from without. He held himself guiltless and stainless. He was only one of many honest men who had been called to endure like indignity and disaster; but the sympathy of mankind would lie with him; and his own steadfast nature and large patience might be counted to gather up the ravelled texture of his life and carry on the old design in a manner worthy of him and his family.

So he argued and, keeping those who had wronged him out of his thoughts, reflected upon his children. They must not suffer for the loss of a wicked mother. Nor did he fear it. They were old enough to understand and would

appreciate the situation. John Henry was already established on land presently to be his own. Peter would stay at Red House and gradually assume command; for Red House and the business some day must fall to his portion. Avis would marry in a year or two and go to Owley Farm. There remained Auna, and for Auna he felt no fear. She was his own, his nearest and dearest—all that he would soon have left. She would never leave him until the breath was out of his body. The future stretched stark and clean. He must suffer, and he began to realise how deeply; but the intermittent pangs of the future would not corrode and sear as the torment of the past. He knew that he might struggle back to peace, given the time to do it, for with self-respect all things are possible, and he felt that he had already regained that.

He dwelt on details. When she was free of him, the other man would doubtless take her. Whither would he take her? They could not live at Shipley in sound of his voice. The excuses to stop at Shipley would not hold now. The woman would see to that and remove herself beyond reach, both of him and her own outraged family. He thought of Judith and Barlow Huxam and imagined their dismay.

And meantime, with the snow-blink on one side of their faces and the firelight on the other, Margery and her children sat at breakfast. She had heard from Barton Gill that Jacob was not in the kennels, and after putting off the questions of Avis and Peter for a time, something seemed to break in her heart. A sense of destruction mastered her and she began to cry. Her reserve and the caution, practised a thousand times to disarm the children's questions when Jacob would not speak, deserted her. She was indifferent and could no longer pretend anything after the events of the previous night. She was also physically exhausted and had no wits longer to parry the youthful attack. She told them that their father was very angry with her and had said that he never meant to speak to

her again. And then she succumbed and wept helplessly before them.

Avis was awed and Peter angry.

"I hate father—I hate him!" he cried. "He's a bad man, and this isn't the first time he's made you miserable."

"John Henry will protect you, mother," said Avis. "And I'll hate father too, if he's cruel to you. And so will grandmother Huxam."

Auna put her arms round her mother's neck.

"Forgive him," she said. "You always make it up with us when we are naughty. Perhaps you was naughty, or said something he didn't understand."

"It's him says things we don't understand," declared Peter, "and mother's never naughty, and you ought to be ashamed to say it, Auna."

"We're often naughty without knowing it, Peter," explained Auna.

"Well, and if we are, how can we know we're naughty when nobody tells us?" asked Avis. "Father won't speak to mother, and how can you make it up if a person won't speak to you?"

"You can speak to them," said Auna.

Her mother was in the broken-spirited state when an adult will talk with children as equals.

"I did speak to him, Auna," she said. "I prayed him to listen and tell me what I'd done. But I'm never to hear him speak again."

"Then more won't I," declared Peter. "God's my judge, mother, if father don't say he's sorry for being such a beast, I'll run away from him."

"And so will I," added Avis. "And if I was you, I'd run away too, mother. Then where would he be?"

Auna, terrified at these words, crept out of the room and ran away to hide her own tears. Then Margery dried her eyes and controlled herself.

"Don't you pay no heed to the silly things I've said—either of you. It'll come right. And I won't have no

hard words against father. A better father and a kinder and more generous, no children ever had. So never let me hear you say one word against him, for that I couldn't bear. He'll come home all right I expect; and don't let him see nothing but smiles when he does. And both forget I was such a silly mother as to cry about nothing. Where's Auna? I've frightened the child. Now you be off to the kennels, both of you, and sweep the snow away, and let's all be ashamed of ourselves."

Thus she sought to undo the mischief of her weakness, and partially succeeded; but her own moods swept her like a cross-sea, and when the interminable hours of the morning had passed, when noon came, and dinner time, and still Jacob did not return, she began to lose her nerve again.

She yearned for her mother, and the longing grew until at last, unable to endure more, she dressed for walking and slipped out of Red House unknown to the children. At every turn of the way to Brent she expected to meet Jacob; but he did not appear. He was coming back by Lydia Bridge and reached his home an hour after Margery had left it. He guessed that she had gone not to return, and was glad. He had spent the morning with his lawyer, a man older than himself, who expressed deep concern at hearing his opinions and prayed for patience and delay. Mr. Dawes had worked for Jacob's father before him and felt staggered by this most unexpected disaster. He read the record while Jacob sat and waited; then he argued for time, for reconsideration and explanations—at worst a separation for the family's sake. But he spoke to deaf ears and Jacob presently explained that he was there to direct and not receive advice. The lawyer's talk appeared worse than vain from his standpoint, for all was already accomplished and only the details remained. His evidence assured the sequel. The incredulity of Mr. Dawes made Bullstone impatient and the lawyer's lamentations he nipped in the bud. He left explicit directions to institute proceedings for divorce against his wife and cited

Adam Winter as co-respondent. Once more Mr. Dawes protested at the absurdity of the situation. Against Adam no whisper had ever been heard. He enjoyed a reputation for plain-dealing and stood well among the Chosen Few.

But Jacob declined argument.

"I'm here to issue orders," he said, "and you're here to carry them out. If you won't, I can put my business into other hands."

Thus it was left and the solicitor, deeply concerned for both parties, read and re-read Jacob's statement, yet felt the issue to be in the highest degree doubtful. He could barely believe the truth of Bullstone's claims and he suspected that the other parties might well deny them and fight him. He perceived the horror of such a situation, and determined at any cost to change his client's mind, if it were possible to do so. He decided for the moment to brave Bullstone's anger and do nothing at all. He would at least give the man time to grow calm and consider the gravity of his intentions. As yet Jacob was far from calm; he stood too near the evidence of his own senses, and Mr. Dawes perceived that he was beyond reason for the moment. He left it and only hoped that Bullstone would not throw down his challenge, and so drive his wife from him for ever.

But this climax was reached before the end of that day.

At dusk Mr. and Mrs. Huxam drove up to Red House in a cab, asked to see Jacob and were shown into the parlour. They did not bring Margery, but came for an explanation of her husband's conduct.

Jacob was in the kennels when they arrived and quickly joined them. He brought in a lamp with him and set it on the table.

Barlow Huxam spoke as soon as the door was shut.

"Our daughter came to us this afternoon in a very poor way," he said. "It seems that last night you swore before her face never to let her hear your voice again. You kept your word to-day and went to Brent this morn-

ing and didn't return. She waited until far beyond forenoon and then came to us. If you can explain this in a manner to satisfy me and my wife, I'll be glad, because on the face of it, it looks as if you'd took leave of your senses, Jacob."

"I've taken leave of my honour, that's all," answered Bullstone. "Or it would be truer to say that my honour has been stolen from me by my wife. You understand what I mean no doubt. I've got proof positive and shall act accordingly. I'm sorry for you too."

"Good God! You stand there and dare to say and think that Margery's not faithful to you?"

"Saying and thinking matter nothing now. I've said too little, Barlow Huxam, and I've thought too much. Now I know—I know. It's in my lawyer's hands—Mr. Dawes—and you'll hear from him, if you're going to stand for your daughter."

"Let's be clear," answered Huxam, who was now very angry. "Let's get to the bottom of this, before we see you for the last time I hope. What shall we hear from Mr. Dawes?"

"You'll hear that I'm going to divorce my wife for her adulteries—that's what you'll hear."

"You dare to stand there before me and tell that damnable lie. Margery! Margery! And you've lived with her for near twenty years and can think it! What filth are you made of? What poisonous, beastly stuff has got into you? Her—the clean, pure thing—with nought but honest blood in her veins and honest thoughts in her mind! Her—adultery—you're a madman!"

"You'd better go," answered Bullstone quietly. "If she doesn't own it, so much the worse. There's no defence for either of them. I'm not mad, though my Maker knows I've endured enough to make me. I want to hear nothing about her—or him. I want to be free, and I mean to be free."

Then Judith Huxam spoke. She had been sitting mo-

tionless while her husband walked up and down the room. She had turned very pale, when Jacob stated his determination, and she had put her hand up to her breast and kept it there. She was quite collected and showed no emotion.

"And who is the man, Jacob Bullstone?" she asked.

"Adam Winter is her paramour."

"That godly, steadfast creature!"

Barlow spoke and bade his wife rise and accompany him.

"We'll be gone. This must be answered by others than us," he said.

But Mrs. Huxam did not move. A strange expression was in her face. She looked coldly and curiously at Jacob. Then a faint flush lightened her pallor.

"The mills of God grind slow but exceeding sure," she said. "I understand; I know what's happened now, and you'll know presently. Eighteen and more years ago I came into this room for the first time, and I saw a sight that shook me to the roots of my being. I saw that you'd flung another book to lie on the Bible. Looking back, I've often wondered why I didn't stop your marriage with our daughter on that. But the Lord chose that things should go on; and they went on. And He was looking ahead to this; and, in His mercy, He showed me yesterday that nothing better than this could have happened. He showed me yesterday, when you spoke blasphemies in my ears, that it was time Margery left you if she was to save her soul. So I'm not surprised at what you've told me to-night. This is all God's plan. He chooses strange tools to do His work, as you said yesterday, and He's chose you yourself and no other, to part you from your wife. You understand that, don't you? It ain't Adam Winter, or any other man, that's come between you and the mother of your children. It's yourself—led to it by an outraged God. You are one of the doomed and always was, as I've known too well these many days, though, Christian like, I hoped and prayed for you. But the Lord knew, and

He's took our child from the evil to come and—hear this—He'll take your children from the evil to come also. There must be offences, Jacob Bullstone, but woe—woe to them that bring them! Our child shall hear your voice no more as you have sworn; and neither shall you hear her voice, nor see her again, nor yet her shadow. If you'd been a saint till now, this piece of work would have damned you, and henceforth you'll go the scorn of every self-respecting woman and the hate of every man. And you'll call on the hills to cover you, but they won't."

She got up and looked at her husband.

"Now we can go," she said.

"And understand this," added Barlow, whose voice, even in passion, sounded genial and mellow contrasted with his wife's—"Mind this, you dirty dog, if I spend every farthing I have on earth, and have got to borrow more on my knees from my neighbours, I'll fight you to the end, till my daughter's righted in the face of the nation. And when that's done, may God help you, for there won't be any other party to do it. And Winter will say the same."

Jacob was unshaken.

"The spoken word remains," he answered, "and the long story remains—every item—stamped in my brain for eternity. They may lie; but justice is justice. No power on earth can undo what's done, or leave it doubtful."

"You speak true," said Mrs. Huxam. "God Almighty will see to that. There'll be no shadow of doubt on earth, or in hell, or heaven, when this is blazed to the light."

They went out to drive away. Snow had begun to fall again and the full force of a blizzard was reserved for this night.

"Best tell your driver to go by the lower road," said Jacob calmly, as he stood and saw them depart. "There'll be drifts already on the other way."

BOOK II

CHAPTER I

CHORUS

WITHIN a month of his wife's departure, Jacob Bullstone began to perceive the full significance of the thing that he had done. *the price of the land*

He learned that his petition would be opposed and he received from Barlow Huxam a cheque, being the present market value of the land on which the postmaster's house was in course of erection. And time had opened his eyes to other issues, for he found that the sympathy he anticipated was not forthcoming. Acquaintances evaded him, and when he expected his few friends to express regret at his misfortunes, they did not. Indeed all were anxious to avoid the subject on such occasions as they were unable to avoid him. From a brief, unnatural quest of fellow-creatures, therefore, and an inner impulse, to seek a spirit of support, Jacob soon turned back into himself, since no such spirit appeared. Time dragged and he grew more and more restless on discovering the body of public opinion ranged against him.

One thing he had done, two days after the outrage that demanded it. He had first written to Adam Winter expressing his regret for his violence; and he had then torn up the letter and gone to see the master of Shipley in person.

He learned that Samuel Winter was ill and Adam on the land. Their aunt spoke to him, and if looks could have done him evil, Jacob must have suffered. She answered his questions with the fewest words possible, then shut the door in his face. *Right*

Jacob sought Winter, found him presently, walked up to him and spoke.

"I only want to say this: that I'm sorry I struck you. I was three parts mad at the time. But I did a wrong thing to assault you and I'm prepared to suffer my penalty in that matter."

Adam was not at work. He walked on the sheltered side of a hedge, with his hands in his pockets, and now he looked curiously at the other.

"Do such a trifle as that trouble you?" he asked. "Well, I've heard you. Now you'd better go. There's nothing to be said between us till I answer you afore the law."

"Are you wise to deny it and bring me to the proofs?"

The other cut him short.

"Go," he said, and Jacob turned away.

He puzzled not a little to understand why his wife's family were prepared to defend the case, and supposed that they must honestly believe their daughter to be wronged. He explained this on the assumption that appearances set against the likelihood of such an offence, and they knew not that the final evidence was in his own possession. He had conversations with his lawyer and found Mr. Dawes not in the least helpful. The old man had obeyed him with extreme reluctance; but he did not pretend to be in sympathy with his client, and the fact that both Jacob's wife and Adam Winter were prepared to oppose the appeal and deny the offence went far to make Mr. Dawes still less sanguine. He tried again and again to change Bullstone's mind and failed; but his attitude served to create increased bewilderment in the other. Indeed Jacob puzzled to see how isolated he had become. The fact made him still more determined and still more distrustful of everybody but himself. He resented such lack of understanding and was impelled by it to trumpery emotions, ridiculous in the light of his present huge affliction. They persisted, however, and his wounded pride drove him forward with increasing obstinacy to fight to the end, that his wrongs

might be proved and his justification appear. There awoke a desire to confound those who now set flowing the tides of criticism against him. They came as a new thing, contrary to experience, for he had always understood that the betrayed husband might count upon the support of most serious-minded people. At home there was no pity for him save in one quarter. The children came and went from their grandparents, and he had expected that they might bring messages; but they never did. Not a syllable ever reached him from his wife, or from the Huxams. Indeed his own boy and elder girl were restive and taciturn under this terrible situation. Once Avis reported that Margery was ill, and Peter openly corrected her for mentioning her mother at Red House. Only Auna continued trustful, but she missed her mother and was very downcast and silent. She, too, went to see Margery; but even she had nothing to say on returning home.

Once Jacob asked Auna if her mother were at the post-office; but the girl only looked frightened and shook her head. Whereupon he soothed her.

"Don't take on, Auna. Trust me. The others can't, but you understand me best. You must trust me as much as you love me. Mother and I have got to part, because she has done what I can't forgive. Indeed she wouldn't come back any more if she could. She won't want to do that. But I hope you'll stop with me, because I don't see how we could ever live without each other. But you must all decide that for yourselves when I've been to London."

It was a strange speech to Auna's ear, yet she felt no doubt. To live away from her mother seemed a terrible thought, but life away from her father must be impossible. She told herself that she would sooner be dead than live without him, and she assured him of the fact; whereupon he warned her.

"Always think that whatever may happen," he said. "There will be people who will tell you that I am the wicked one; but everybody will know differently before

very long. For God forbid that I should tell anything but the truth, Auna; and the truth is enough. And many hate me and speak evil against me, and I know Avis and Peter believe it, and John Henry believes it, else he'd have been over to see me before now. But you mustn't believe it. You mustn't let anything come between us, Auna."

Already with proleptic instinct he sought to tighten the bonds between the child and himself; already he felt that a time might quickly come when, of all his family, she alone would be left. But only a passing mood prompted him to this scene with the girl. Again and again, while time dragged intolerably and he smarted under consciousness of the people's aversion, he calmed himself with assurance that time would soon vindicate and justify. Then those who now lacked pity for his plight, or anger against his wrongs, would be the first to come forward and acknowledge their errors.

One supporter he had—of a sort who rather embarrassed him than not. Yet the new kennel-man, George Middleweek, was staunch enough, and having gleamed particulars of the situation, though not from Bullstone, resolutely upheld Jacob.

Middleweek succeeded Barton Gill, who had now finally withdrawn from Red House to live in a cottage half a mile distant, and since the new-comer's character was clouded by past intemperance, he entertained a lively regard for Jacob, when he took him on trial against so grave a fault. But Mr. Middleweek understood dogs and promised to be valuable. He swore by his new master from the first and also won Peter's regard.

He was a widower of fifty, and he had the wit to take something of Jacob's measure after a month at Red House. Then he ventured on a friendly word or two and feared that he had been unwise, since Jacob took no notice at the time; but, later on, George perceived that his goodwill had been acceptable.

A week before all interested parties would be called to

London, Bullstone visited William Marydrew, though a shadow now existed between them. For even William proved no whole-hearted friend in Jacob's opinion, and he had been astonished to find that the old man terribly doubted.

William declared the tragedy a personal one; he felt for both parties and was aged by a misfortune so unexpected.

"I thought nobody would question that I was right," said Jacob, "and yet such is the regard in most people for the woman over the man that even you——"

"But you can't well understand, from your own-self point, how this looks to the world at large, including me," explained William. "It's come on all the nation like a bolt from the blue, because no thought of such a fatal thing ever fouled the air. The dirtiest tongue would not have dared to whisper it. 'Tis beyond belief and experience of the parties; and what seems the gathered knowledge of many days to you, falls on our ears like a clap of thunder. And so you can't expect folk to side with you as a matter of course, Jacob. On the contrary, 'tis the last thing you might have expected with such a record for fine living and clean behaviour as your wife has. And the last straw was when we heard that she and Adam Winter deny and defy you and he going to stand up for their good names. The common people don't know much, but where human nature's the matter, they be quite as clever as the scholars, and often a damn sight cleverer; because the poor are up against human nature all the time and life teaches them the truth about it; whereas the other kind miss it, owing to book larning being so mighty different. And hearing that Adam and Mrs. Bullstone are going to fight you, the people take their side; because well they know they wouldn't stand up before a judge and jury if their cause weren't good. No—they'd cut and run, as you expected to see 'em."

"The people argue without knowledge of the facts," an-

swered Jacob; "but you, who have heard the facts from me in secret and know whereon my case stands—how you can still hold the balance against me, for all our long friendship—that puzzles me, William."

"I'm a truthful man where my memory will let me be," answered Mr. Marydrew, "and so I won't pretend anything. Words have as many meanings as a songbird have notes, Jacob, and the ear be often bluffed into believing things by the mind that is hungry to believe 'em. Against the words, which sounded to your ear as if them two was in each other's arms, you've got to balance what's mightier than words. That's deeds and the conduct of a lifetime, and principles that have never been doubted. Winter's life all men know. He's religious in a true sense, and though I've got no use for the Chosen Few, no more than you have, yet you can't deny that there's never been one of 'em caught out in a crooked deed."

"It's that canting, stiff-necked sort who always are caught soon or late," answered Jacob, "and I'll say this, William: I believe that if my late wife had had her way, she'd have been much too clever to take this line. She knows the damnable truth in her heart, and she's been driven into denying it by her parents—not for her own sake, but their credit. She never told them the truth of course. And if she had, seeing there are no witnesses that I can call, they'd deny it."

But Billy shook his head.

"Mrs. Huxam wouldn't have made her husband fight for a lie. She believes that her daughter is a wronged woman, and she'll be true to her rooted faith, that this has happened for good by the will of God. Of course I don't believe that everything that happens is to the good myself, but Judith Huxam holds to that opinion, and she's saying that what you've done puts you down and out for eternity, while it opens the door to your wife's salvation, which you were making doubtful. You'll find that this dreadful job won't shake her in her opinion, that God's

behind all; and the upshot won't shake you in your opinion, that God have nothing to do with our disasters—beyond building us in a pattern that's bound to breed 'em.

"You and me agree that the evil that matters to us comes from within—so there you are. And the pity is that the evil we breed can't stop with us, but must pour over for other people; and that again shows it isn't only the evil we breed from within matters, because we be all called upon to suffer, more or less, from the evil that others breed. In fact 'tis a very pitiful come-along-of-it every way and I wish to God I'd gone to my rest afore it happened."

Thus William discoursed; but he did not depress his hearer. Jacob Bullstone could only wonder at the blindness of his neighbours. He wasted no more time in resenting it. He only pressed forward to the hour when all would justify him and grant that he was not deceived.

Billy changed the subject, though that was difficult to do. During these tumultuous days he dreaded the appearance of Bullstone and sometimes even made shift to avoid him. For, like many others, he was deeply sensible of his friend's approaching downfall and, unlike many others, who now hated Jacob, he—a lifelong friend—mourned for the future and feared the shape that it must take with such a man.

"How's your new hand, George Middleweek?" he asked. "He's a chap as knows his own mind—faulty though it is."

"A success. I like him, because he is sane and understanding. After Barton Gill he's a comfort. He has character and a pretty good knowledge of life. And he won't fall over the drink again. I've let him into my feelings a bit—not about my troubles, but my opinions in general. He's a widower and doesn't trust religious people, nor yet women."

William laughed at this description.

“So much the more time to give to the dogs. I’ve often known them as was devoted to dogs didn’t like women. Yet, though they be oftener compared to cats, I’ve known a good few dog-like women also. Not so much dog-like towards men, but dog-like to duty and religion and children and so on. My daughter, Mercy, was such a woman. Duty and religion were one with her. In fact duty was her religion and she made it a very good working faith. For what more can you ask of religion than to keep you out of mischief and to make you live in honesty and charity with your neighbours? That’s reality; but a lot of religion is not. I knew a saint of God once, and she was on all accounts the most objectionable woman I ever did know—made the very thought of Heaven chilly. A bleak, holy woman, as never did a wrong thing, or thought a wrong thought, and yet left the bulk of her neighbours in a beastly temper after she’d been along with them five minutes. How she did it nobody could understand. The very parson she sat under gave her a miss when he could.”

“Women have wronged men far oftener than men have wronged them,” said Bullstone and William sighed doubtfully.

“There’s less understanding between the men and women than there was,” he answered. “Education drives ’em apart instead of draws ’em together. The women be getting so famous clever that they see a lot about us that used to be hidden from ’em, and we don’t bulk so grand in their eyes as we did. They have a deal hidden in ’em that’s been waiting to come out; and now it’s beginning to do so. It was always there, mind you, but hid under ignorance, and I say us men haven’t half known our luck all these years.”

Jacob listened.

“They’re changing for the worse,” he said.

“They are trying out the stuff hid in ’em,” repeated William. “Woman be God A’mighty’s last creation, Jacob, and no doubt He worked into ’em pretty near everything

He'd got left over. Us never will understand all there is to 'em, and only a fool thinks he can."

"I was such a fool."

"Don't drag yourself in. Keep your mind open. That's what I pray you to do. You've appealed to the Law and you must abide by the Law. And if it holds that you are mistook; then——" He broke off and took the younger man's hand.

"I'm your friend, be it as it may," he said.

Jacob nodded, shook the ancient hand and went his way without words.

For a moment he considered William's broken sentence, but could not see what might have finished it.

Indeed Mr. Marydrew himself felt the fatuity of any ultimate thought or hope at this crisis.

With very genuine grief in his eyes he watched Bullstone depart.

"Broke on the wheel of the world, because he weren't turned true," he said to himself. "But which of us be? Which of us be? Not one."

CHAPTER II

VERDICT

SPRING had conquered the river valleys and was climbing to hilltop again. Those old pack-horse tracks, where by-gone generations of beast and man have gradually beaten the ways down and down, until they run lower than the fields and the woods about them—those deep, heat-holding Devonshire lanes were dowered with green once more and lush with young leaves and fronds. At their feet opened wood sanicle and dewy moschatel; crowning them the blue-bells wove their purple and scattered their fragrance; beside rill and water-trough golden saxifrages shone, and the wood strawberry was in blossom with the violet.

Amelia, after noon on the day that followed Adam Winter's return from London, put on her sunbonnet and taking a man's walking-stick, which she had always used since her illness, crossed Shipley Bridge, passed over the green space beyond and presently reached the home of Mr. Marydrew. She knocked and he came to the door.

"Morning, Billy," she said. "I thought you'd like to know how it went. Adam got back last night and just caught a train after the verdict was given. T'others come home to-day—so he believes."

"I needn't ax you for the verdict. I see it in your face," he answered. "But come in and tell me, what you've heard."

She sat by his kitchen fire presently and tapped the ground with her stick to drive home the points. He listened without comment.

"'Tis a triumph for the Chosen Few against the ways

of darkness," declared Amelia, "and it went very much indeed as you said it would; and we won't talk about him, nor yet the proper wreck and ruin he's made of himself, because we shan't agree about that. But this is what happened. He said what his beastly thoughts made him believe was the truth; and his wife and my nephew told what was the real truth; and then his great weapon against them broke his own head. He gave out certain words, that he swore he'd heard Margery and Adam use in Adam's own bedroom by night. He'd heard Margery say, 'Quick, quick—there's a dear'; and he'd heard Adam say, 'Come, then—come.' And Margery had laughed."

Mr. Marydrew nodded.

"That was his tower of strength; but I always warned him he might have heard wrong, and that if they denied it there was only his word against theirs."

"They didn't deny it," answered Miss Winter. "Like the truthful creatures that they are, they admitted every syllable—and why not? For how were them words said do you suppose? The truth was this. Poor Samuel had been struck down by the illness just after Adam recovered. Margery had brought some nice food for me, and Adam had axed her to come upstairs and coax Samuel to take his medicine, which he refused to do. It was in Samuel's room and to Sammy himself, while she offered him his physic in a wine-glass, that Margery said, 'Quick, quick—there's a dear'; and it was to Samuel that Adam said, 'Come, then—come.' And then Samuel had bolted his physic and Margery had laughed at the face he pulled. And when they heard that explanation, the jurymen believed it. They had long got restive and weary of the whole piece of nonsense, and now they said they were satisfied, and Adam says that anybody could have seen, even before the jury spoke, that the judge was also terrible tired of it. The great judge summed up on the evidence that Bullstone brought forward, and that his wife and Adam explained, and he talked mighty straight to the

petitioner—that's Jacob Bullstone—and told him that he'd let vain imaginings get hold on his mind and allowed his jealousy to poison his vision and his sense of justice and honour to his wife and to the co-respondent—that's my nephew. He said that in his opinion it was a dreadful thing that good money and good time should have been wasted over an obstinate and mistaken man's error. Then he talked to the jury, and presently the jury went out. But in three minutes by the clock they was back in court and dismissed the petition with costs, and all his fabric of lies and flimsy fancies was down in the dust. And that means Bullstone can't get no divorce, and Margery and Adam come out of it without a shadow upon 'em, and her hateful husband have got to pay the lawyers every penny and all the expenses. Because the judge agreed with the verdict, and went so far as to say that there were no grounds whatever for the suit, and that it should never have been brought. In a word right has triumphed, and I shall always think a lot more respectful of the Law than I have in the past."

"Costs follow the verdict, of course," answered Billy, after considering this matter in silence. "And what else follows it? We shall see as to that. Time must pass. A good flight of time be the only thing for all parties, Amelia."

"Time can do a lot," she said, "but it can't undo what's done; and if you think——"

"Let time pass," he repeated. "Only time will heal the sores."

"You needn't talk like that," said the old woman. "Adam haven't got no sores, except natural sorrow for an ill-used woman. For himself, nought can gall one like him. He's above the people's blame or praise, for when a man goes into a law court, and gets mauled by a paid lawyer, whose business be to show him in the wrong; and when he comes out of it with only the respect of his fellow-creatures, and never a stain on his life and history—

then you may reckon he's a bit out of the common. And she was white as death in court and fainted once. And my nephew's terrible sorry for the woman, and sorry for himself, too, because he says he can never have any more to do with her. It's a natural instinct in him that they must be nought to each other after this; and I doubt not Margery will feel the same. Their lives can never touch in friendship no more, William."

"Very like they would both feel so," admitted Billy. "And what does Adam say about Jacob Bullstone?"

"He won't name him, and when Samuel cursed him and threatened great blows against him, Adam bade his brother be careful to do no evil. All he said was that Bullstone would suffer last and suffer longest."

"A very true saying, and your nephew be the wisest of all concerned," declared the old man. "For Adam this came as the greatest shock, because it burst upon him more unexpected and terrible than on the woman even. She knew her husband's weakness and, for brave pride, hid it from all eyes, including Adam's. And he will agree with me that 'time' is the only word."

"In your opinion it may be," answered Amelia; "but in the opinion of the Chosen Few, I reckon 'eternity' will be the only word. And don't you think, or dream, or tell Adam, or this fool, Bullstone, or anybody else, that time be going to soften it, because there's plenty of righteous people about as will take very good care that time does no such thing."

"That's what I'm afraid of," admitted Billy; "but don't you be one of them, my dear. If us would only let time, like patience, do her perfect work, wounds might often heal that never do; but no doubt a lot of godly folk won't be content to stand by and leave this pair in the hands of God."

"What God wills must happen," answered Amelia, "but you may bet your life, William, He won't will to bring them two together again; and nobody but a vain thinker

and a man weak in faith would hope such a horror. However, you can very well leave Margery to her Maker and her mother; and as to her husband, if he was a man, he'd hang himself."

"Don't you be angry," urged Mr. Marydrew. "Your nephew have come out as he went in, without a shadow upon him. For the rest, don't you cast a stone. That ain't like you. Let charity conquer."

"You're his side we all know," answered Miss Winter; "and I'll give you a warning for yours. Don't let your sense of justice go down afore the wicked man. He'll gnash his teeth no doubt and wring his hands; but don't you try to come between him and his punishment, Billy, because you can't."

"True. I can't," he replied. "If you knew Bullstone like what I do, you'd have no fear he was going to escape anything."

Then Amelia astonished him by a penetration for which he had not given her credit. Her intuition may have sprung from anger—a fruitful source of bitter truth—but it threw a light upon what might presently happen, and William was not prepared, though much inclined, to contradict.

"You say that. But a woman always knows one side of men better than any man can, and old maid though I may be, I'll tell you this. Bullstone ain't the sort to lie in the dirt for his sins and scrape himself with potsherds. Don't you think that. He'll snatch at hope, like the drowning at a straw. He'll look at it all from his own point of view, as usual, and fifty to one he'll fool himself there's a way out. Yes—he won't see himself as all clean and honest men see him, William. He'll only see that his wife's a pure woman and that he was mistook to think her a whore. And what then? Have he got the decency to pour ashes on his head for shame, and slink away from the sight and sound of men? Not him! He'll say Margery's worthy of him, after all, and that he must have her

home again. He'll expect presently to find her forgive him like the Christian she is, and it will be his fixed dream and hope to win her back at any cost—till he wakes from the dream and the hope dies. And not till then will his true punishment begin. That's Jacob Bullstone, and that's the man his wife knows, and we know, and you'll live to know. Far ways off what you pictured—eh?"

The ancient doubted.

"What you say about a woman knowing a side of man's mind that other men do not, be very likely true," he answered. "But I trust you will live to see yourself mistook in this matter. It's a great thought and you may be right; but if that happened, along with it would go a lot more that's in the man, which I know and no woman does. I can only say again, let time take charge, and I wish nobody else but time was going to have a hand in it."

While they talked, Adam Winter wandered, unseeing, among his sheep on the hill with his hands in his pockets and a sense of anticlimax in his soul. The excitement was ended. He had seen himself justified and cleared; he had seen an innocent woman pitied; and he had seen Bullstone confounded. Now he was in the midst of sweet things and breathing fresh air with the heights rolling before his eyes and the larks aloft. But no exhilaration, only a sense of sickness and misery hung over him. He, too, longed for the time to pass, that the sordid memories of the trial might grow fainter.

Elsewhere Jacob Bullstone travelled from London and sat wrapped in his thoughts. But they were no covering for him. They fled past in wild rags and tatters, as the steam across the train window; and he could not frame a consistent argument, or follow any line of reasoning. All was chaotic, confused, hurtling, and every thought lashed like a whip. He struggled against the rush of ideas as a man against a blinding storm. He could clutch at nothing for support; or perceive any steadfast glimpse through this welter of what the future held in store. He was too

astonished to suffer much as yet, save unconsciously, as an animal suffers. The reality, as it had developed in a law court, took a form so utterly unlike that which he had accepted as reality, that simple amazement reigned in him for a long time. It supported him in a sense through the trial and, now, as he came home, it gradually gave place to bewilderment, which, in its turn, quieted down until the stormy waters of his mind grew sufficiently smooth to offer a reflection of the situation newly created, and he began to trace the picture of the future.

He was trying to appreciate this evasive vision and find some firm, mental rock for his own feet when he got home again. But as yet nothing clearly emerged, and as often as he clutched at a steadfast-seeming point from which to start thinking, the image broke up under the storm swell which still swept through his mind. He felt as one in the presence of death. He desired to know, now that this earthquake had fallen upon him and his, who were left alive. He felt himself to be first among the dead, and believed, until much later, that existence could only be a living death henceforward.

Then he tramped after noon through the lanes, carrying his bag and sweating under the black clothes he wore. He pursued the familiar way, walked, ridden, driven a thousand times from boyhood to manhood, and he found an empty, peaceful spot in his brain that could see the blue-bells and mark the breaking riot of the green. This consciousness of spring served to revive an element which had persisted with him during the past destruction and denunciation of the Divorce Court. He had listened humbly to the appalling errors the Law declared him to have committed, and he had viewed without passion the naked picture of his mistaken suspicions—each displayed and each destroyed by truth in turn. He felt no rage at this juncture—only the gathering surprise that finally overwhelmed him for a time, to the exclusion of more vital emotion. But, as the judge spoke, he felt great, vital

wounds inflicted one after the other on his soul, yet endured them without flinching. Still the shame and condemnation were less than the astonishment, that his convictions should be but a phantom dance of falsity coloured to look like truth by his own sick mind.

The farther view and deeper estimate had to come. He was not near reaching them yet, nor had he developed anything like the attitude that Amelia Winter prophesied; but his brain now began to tune for a new outlook. The answer that he must make to the destruction of all his intentions and decisions was not so far propounded. He still loitered in thought with himself, but as he approached the valley in which his life had been passed, its tenderness and joyful, vernal spirit unconsciously influenced him, distracting his mind away from himself—not to the unconscious phenomena around him—but to the supreme and solemn figure in the fantasy now at an end. He thought of his wife. Whereupon a new phase opened in his mental processes and he began to regard with naked eyes the edifice of the past. Dwelling now upon the trial, he asked himself whether he still persisted in his former convictions, or whether the united and independent judgment of his fellow-men had proved their falsehood. That he could even propose this question calmly was a fact sufficient to indicate the answer. No such possibility would have entered his mind, had he not been prepared to weigh it and ultimately accept it. Yet he hesitated for the present to tell himself that he was convinced; for that admission meant such stultification of self, such absolute abnegation and retraction, such penitence, contrition and atonement, that he doubted his power to attain to them. Only did it seem possible to do so by keeping Margery and her sufferings in the forefront of his mind; and that was not practicable until he decided whether he would accept the decisions uttered against him, admit the justice of the world's rebuke and proceed to create a new life on the ground blasted, but also cleansed, by these fires.

Before he reached William Marydrew's house he began to plan the future, as though he had the planning and need but indicate his purpose to see life fall in with it!

Abased indeed he must stand; but his particular sort of pride was not going to suffer eternally before a confession of error. So he told himself and already half believed that the opinion of his fellow-men would weigh little against the possibility of reconciliation. In that case all future life should be devoted on his part to atoning for the awful wrongs he had put upon her; and the censure of others, at worst, must be thistledown to the stinging hail of his own self-condemnation.

He saw all existence to be narrowed to this one ambition, and so swiftly and inconsequently was his broken intelligence now moving, that he had already swept the past away and pressed on to the future and the tasks that there awaited him. Through these immense changes his mind sped among the bluebells; then he walked in sight of the man and woman talking at William's cottage door, and Amelia hastily departed.

"There he cometh!" she said. "Pounding over the ground—boring along like a bull—the hateful creature. And now he can bore into the earth and bide there; for there won't be the face of a decent man, woman, or child to welcome him no more."

"Yes, there will," replied Billy. "A man there is, if I'm still worth to be called one, and a child there is, while his youngest remains. Soften your heart, Amelia, for surely the conquerors can afford to forgive."

She went off and in a few minutes Bullstone reached Mr. Marydrew. He was full of his own thoughts and present ambitions; but he felt the necessity to retrace the ground and, even in his present excitation, could remember that he had reached a point which William could not possibly understand until he had been informed of some of the stages that had served to lift Jacob from the depths to the situation he now occupied.

He came in, thankfully accepted the offer of a cup of tea and spoke while William prepared it.

He had already reached the conclusion that he must confess absolute error without excuse. For a moment he had considered the justice of such a complete surrender, by arguing that the play of circumstances were to a large extent responsible for his mistakes and their culmination; but he felt, before the tremendous conclusion, that any attempt to extenuate would be peddling and even dangerous. There was truth in the fact that time and chance had played his nature cruel tricks and it might be that others, after hearing the complete admission he designed, would think of these things and advance some few counters on his behalf; but he would not do it himself; he would not take refuge under any sort of justification, or seek to modify the awful thing he had accomplished. Thus the strange spectacle of a man almost cheerful in his destruction appeared to William, and he perceived at once the impatience with which Jacob recounted the details, and the anxiety under which he laboured, to get the past behind him as swiftly as possible and face the future. He was not crushed by what had happened, because he was already clinging, heart and soul, to what might happen. Horror of the thing done no longer dominated him, for interest and concentration upon the things yet to be done.

Thus he came to his ancient friend in a mood beyond Billy's imagination, and as he talked volubly and proceeded from past facts to future hopes, Mr. Marydrew perceived that an angry, old woman, in some mysterious fashion, had known better than himself how these disasters would react upon this man. For Jacob was concerned with his conclusion, not the stages that had led to it. Already he was forgetting them as though they had not existed.

"I knew I was doomed long before the end," said Bullstone. "I saw it in their faces, and I'm a reasonable man, William, and can sit here now and tell you that I wasn't obstinate and stiff-necked about it. Before the

judge talked to me and told me the truth—the blessed truth, William, not the bitter truth. ‘Blessed’ I say, because it opens the door of the future and doesn’t close it for all time. Before the judge poured his scalding words upon me, I knew they were deserved. And knowing them deserved, they hurt different from what he meant them to. That’s the spirit that began to move the moment after my first enormous astonishment to find I was wrong. And the highest moment—the moment that threw all my years of agony to confusion—was when she and him were able to show the words I heard at Shipley were innocent and had to do with Samuel. From that point the tide turned—and I saw all I’d done, and looked back at a lunatic. And you see me now only hungering for the days and nights to speed past, so that the madness that have overtook me may be sunk—sunk and forgotten in the light of the sanity that’s coming—that’s come. For I’m here in my right mind, William.”

“Don’t run on too fast, however, Jacob,” warned the elder. “I’m very thankful you can accept the truth, because, thank God, that leaves the door open, as you say. But you must remember that there’s a lot more goes to this than for you to say you’re sorry about it. You must use your good sense and your new-found wits to see how it all looked and still looks to the injured parties.”

It seemed that Bullstone was doomed ever to move in the atmosphere of the unreal. Unreal grief and imaginary disasters had ruined his life; and now he sought to rebuild the wreck by his own achievements, independently of the actual course of affairs, which must depend upon others. His hopes might well prove as illusory as his vanished fears. The man’s mind was always in extremes.

Billy’s warning cooled Bullstone.

“I know—I know,” he answered. “I’m assuming nothing. My whole life will be a long atonement to her—to lift myself from where I have sunk, till I’m worthy to be forgiven. I see that. I ask none to pardon till they can.

How soon they can depends on me. I'm dealing with better people than myself; so is it too much to hope, even in this awful pass of my life, with destruction and grief around me, that I may rise myself up to be forgiven by them?"

"Not too much to hope; but a darned sight too much to happen—for a very long while, my dear," explained Mr. Marydrew. "You've done a most fearful deed and those that have suffered from it must be given a deuce of a lot of time before they can calm down and see how it all fell out—how the Devil knew your character was prone to jealousy and fooled you according. The first person for you to consider is your wife, and if you can once rub it into her, fully and frankly, that you be sure you'd done her an awful wrong and be set, while life's in your body, to atone for it, then—presently—when she gets away from the influence of her wonderful mother—perhaps.—For Margery knows the good side of you as none else does, and she's slow to anger and quick to forgive. You've got to lay the foundation of the new life, and I hope to God, my dear, you'll soon find it grow; but the shape it takes will depend a good deal on other folk so well as yourself."

"I must proclaim my wickedness and paint it so black, that the mercy of man will intervene and lessen my blame of myself, if only for the credit of human nature," said Bullstone.

"Man won't be much put about. 'Tis the mercy of woman be going to be most use to you," answered Billy. "You must court that. After all, jealousy be a left-handed compliment to them; and they can always forgive that without much trouble—up to a point. Of course you went far beyond that point, however, because the Devil got in you, and turned your eyes crooked, and made life look like a nightmare, same as it do if you see yourself in a spoon. You'll want the patience of Job to endure the next six months or so; but other men have come through and why not you?"

"I know that human nature don't forgive such cruelty as mine very easy. Awful cruel I have been—I, that thought I was made of mercy, William. So life surprises us—so we shock ourselves quite as much as we shock our neighbours. But I keep saying, 'Time's not ended: there's still time.' "

They talked for an hour, then Jacob returned home, to find Avis and Peter. They welcomed him awkwardly, as though he had been a stranger; but that had been their attitude to him of late. Auna had waited for him outside and brought him home. They had kissed but said little as yet. He spoke to his son and elder daughter that night after supper, when George Middleweek, the new kennel-man, had departed and Auna was gone to bed. He owned his errors frankly, as though he were a repentant child confessing to grown-up people. He told them of the evil that he had done, and how he prayed God and man to pardon him. With the microscopic vision of youth, they looked at their father while he spoke. They observed he was very haggard, that he had not shaved and that one of his eyes was shot with blood.

"You're old enough to understand," he said. "I've done a very mistaken, terrible thing and wronged your dear mother as never a good, noble woman was wronged before. There aren't words to say how wicked I've been—nor yet how sorry I am. You must all be patient with me, Peter, and try to forgive me if you can."

They looked at him silent and round-eyed. His appeal embarrassed them and they knew not what to say to him.

"Mother's won, then?" asked Avis, screwing up her courage to the question.

"By the blessing of God she has, Avis."

Uneasily conscious that a man ought not so to speak to his children, they stole away presently, and then breathed again.

There was no pity in them. They only gloried in their father's defeat, as they knew that others would.

"It's knocked the stuffing out of him," said Peter.

"So it has. I hope mother's all right," answered his sister.

"You bet she's all right: she's won. And grandmother and grandfather and Mr. Winter's all right too," promised Peter.

From his false dawn of hope Jacob sank presently into lethargy and reaction. He recalled William Marydrew's speeches for comfort, but found that more than comfort was in them. With night and silence he lay awake reflecting on his wife. Everything depended upon her, not upon him. Could her merciful spirit, even under this awful provocation, become permanently ruthless? He was already fighting fiercely for the rags of his future, in hope to find decent covering among them. The court, the jury, the adverse verdict, the minatory judge were sunk into shadowlands, that mattered less than a bad dream.

CHAPTER III

UTILITY

A LONGING to annihilate time—to crush it, absorb it, put it behind him—dominated Jacob from the hour of his return. He had been for three days from home and found that nothing specially demanded his attention, save letters which Peter could not write. All went smoothly with his business and he was free to concentrate on the greater matter of his life. He told himself that propitiation would be demanded by many. His wife came first, but he felt that uncertain periods of time must be suffered before he could dare to approach her. With Adam Winter, however, his own feverish desire to begin his task assured Jacob that there need be no delay. To put himself right with this wronged man was the thing nearest to his hand, and two days after returning home, he sought out Adam at Shipley.

It chanced that, as he approached the farm, Samuel emerged from a barn. Seeing Bullstone, he grew very red, his jaw worked, and he mopped and mowed like a monkey, but did not speak. The visitor saw hate in his face and rage uncontrolled by reason. Sammy spat on the ground and glowered and watched his enemy pass to the door. Then, having knocked, Jacob looked around, with an instinct to keep his eye on the weak-minded man. But Adam's brother had already departed.

Amelia Winter answered his call and her face seemed to grow smaller when she looked upon him. She shrank back and her bosom rose and she became pale. She waited for him to speak.

"Good morning, Miss Winter," he said. "I'm very

wishful to see your nephew if you will tell me where I am likely to find him."

She did not answer, but left Jacob and went into the house-place. There he heard the murmur of voices, and then Adam came down the stone-paved passage. He was in his working clothes.

"I should think it a great favour if you would let me speak to you for a few minutes," said Bullstone. "I've no right to come before you, but none the less venture to do it."

Adam looked at him without animation or emotion. Only a weary indifference marked his face and echoed in his voice. He was not thinking of Jacob, but his aunt. Amelia had told him that Bullstone would quickly come to grovel. He had much doubted this, but made up his mind to listen if Jacob did seek him.

"If you'll step in here," he said, and opened a door on the left of the entrance.

Jacob went in before him, took off his hat and sat down on a chair by the empty hearth. It was the parlour of Shipley and seldom used. Adam Winter, with his hands in his pockets, walked to the window and stood looking out of it.

"Words are poor things before this business," began Bullstone, "and I won't keep you, or waste your time with many. I've wasted enough of your time, and if you could tell me what that waste stood for in figures, I'd be thankful to make it up to you. I'm only here now to express my abiding sorrow and grief at what I've done, and acknowledge how basely I have wronged you. You know I've wronged you, of course—so does the rest of the world; but you didn't yet know that I know it. I want you to understand that I accept the judgment and all that was said against me, because I deserved every word of it. I've done terrible evil, and the fag end of my life I shall spend in trying to make amends, so far as it lies in my power. After my poor wife, you are the one who

has got most cause to hate me and most cause to demand from me the utmost atonement I can make. But first I ask you, as a good Christian, called to suffer untold trouble through no fault of your own, to pardon those who have trespassed against you. I beg you to forgive me, Adam Winter, and tell me that you can. That's all for the minute."

Winter listened and nodded his head once or twice. He was listless and melancholy. When he spoke he might have been the worsted man, for his voice had none of the ring and conviction of the other's.

"I forgive you, Jacob Bullstone. That's easy enough. And since you are here, I'll speak too, because some inner things didn't come out at the trial. I want you to know that I never heard tell you were a jealous man. Your wife, no doubt, had cause to know it; but if she ever mentioned the fact to anybody, which is little likely, it wasn't to me. Decent partners hide each other's faults because it's seemly they should, and Mrs. Bullstone wasn't more likely to hint at a soft spot in you than, I suppose, you would have been to whisper any weakness you might have found in her. So I knew nothing, and I came into this horror as innocent as my sheep-dog; and if I'd dreamed how it was, I'd have left Shipley years and years ago, at any cost to myself and my family."

"I believe it," answered Jacob. "I understand the manner of man you are now, and the false light that's blinded me these many years is out. And if I could take your sufferings off your shoulders and endure them for you, thankfully I'd do it. I want to be the only one to suffer now—the only one to carry this burden."

"Yes, yes—no doubt. The past is past, and if the past didn't always flow, like a river, into the present and future, life would be as easy for us as for the beasts, that only know the present. Good-bye. God help you and all of us."

He indicated that the interview was done; but Jacob

did not move. He only blundered on, uttering promises and hopes for the future which, to Adam Winter, sounded inconceivably vain.

"And that," said Jacob at last, "brings me to my wife."

"Please don't talk about her to me," interrupted the other. "Can't you see——?"

"I see nothing," answered Bullstone. "But I feel—I feel everything. The past is past, as you say, and past praying for; but there's the future. I thought perhaps you might—I can't go before her—not for many, many days. But you——"

"Me! Good God, man, what are you made of? Me! Don't you understand? But try—try to understand. Try to understand that other men can feel as much as you do and suffer as much. What you've done don't end with yourself and your troubles; what you've done never will end at all in some directions. It's altered the very stuff of life for a score of people. Poison be poison, and we have each got to fight it in our own way. I shall never speak to Mrs. Bullstone again as long as I live—nor she to me. That goes without speech surely? Haven't you seen even so far? Do you suppose nobody's got to go on living and smarting but you?"

It was Winter who had now grown animated and shown a flash of emotion at Jacob's self-absorbed attitude; while Bullstone sank into greater restraint before this larger vision.

"Thank you," he said, rising. "You put me right. My head's in a whirl. I only felt a great longing come over me. But I dare say it's all too late. I won't trouble you no more. Time will show what I feel to you."

"Hold in then," advised the other, his passing fire dead. "Hold in and give time a chance. You can't do time's work, but you may easily undo it. And if time can't serve you, I don't see what can, always excepting your Maker. But lie low—don't go thrusting forward, just because you've got a longing to get right with people. No

doubt you have; but things—there—who am I to preach to you? Leave it, leave it and be gone.”

They parted and Jacob, walking on the Brent road to wait for Auna, who had gone that day to the post-office, pondered the new standpoint set before him. He perceived that he had been shameless, and once more stood under correction from the man he had wronged. Adam Winter was right. He must ‘hold in.’ The storm had yet to burst—the storm of public opinion. He knew not where it might drive him. He had been so eager to start upon the great business of building again that he overlooked the extent of the ruins. His spirit fainted for a little while; and then he turned to think upon Margery and consider her present attitude. Did she recognise the possibility of any reparation? He did not know, yet believed that she presently might. But clearly it was not in his power to anticipate time. He must be patient and endure and see days, weeks, months drag interminably.

He perceived how the disaster had stricken and changed Winter—how deeply it had tintured his thought and bred bitterness in a man hitherto devoid of bitterness. Winter was right to be impatient with him. He had greatly erred to approach Winter so soon. He saw that restraint was called for, and restraint had always been easy to him until now. He, too, was changed, and no doubt everybody who had endured this violence was also changed, if only for a season. Winter had said that things must always be different for ever. That meant that his evil action would actually leave an impress on character—on many characters.

He wished greatly that his wife were alone, to pursue the future in temporary isolation. Then, with the children to go and come. . . . But she was not alone and therein he began to see his greatest danger. She would never be alone, and the influences under which she dwelt would be directed against her own nature and qualities, for she was not strong enough, physically or mentally, to oppose

her mother. She never had been, even when, as sometimes happened, the will existed to oppose her.

Jacob met Auna speeding homeward and she had not changed. Her caresses and smiles greatly heartened him; but she was timid and clearly under influence. He waited for her to speak of her mother, but she did not.

"I hope mother is pretty well again, Auna?" he asked as they neared home, but Auna shook her head resolutely.

"Grandmother made me promise not to speak of mother. She said you wouldn't wish it; and I did promise, father."

"Then you must keep your promise," he answered. "I've done terrible things, Auna, but I'm punished for doing them, and I'm very sorry for doing them, and I hope in time everybody will forgive me."

"I forgive you," she said, "and I never, never will go away from you, so long as you want me."

She held his hand tightly and he guessed that the future had been considered.

"Home is home," he told her, and something in the phrase, striking upon thoughts which were hidden from her father, but belonged to her recent experiences, made the child begin to cry. He guessed that she knew of decisions as yet concealed from him, and that she cried rather for him than herself.

"Cheer up," he said. "There's all the future to try and put things right in, Auna. And you to help me—such a helpful treasure is to me always."

"Grandmother," she sobbed, and Jacob began to comprehend. He was still untutored and in no mood for delay. He devoted a great part of that night to writing to Mrs. Huxam, and next day sent a long letter to her by Avis. It was a letter into which he poured the full flood of his contrition. He confessed his error and the horrible ingredient of character that had vitiated life for him and Margery. He declared himself healed and purified, and implored that his wife's parents, from their Christian standpoint, would be merciful to the weak and not bar

the door to a reconciliation in the future. He humiliated himself and felt no restraining pride to control his abasement. Finally he invited the Huxams to define the situation, that he might know if the time to come held any hope, and he explained that he left himself entirely in his wife's hands. Anything that she might direct and desire he would perform; he suggested leaving Red House for a time and absenting himself indefinitely should Margery wish to return home. He explained that the empty house at Huntingdon Warren was now rented by him, and that he would be very willing to go there at once and remain there for some months if the proposition commended itself to them. Thus he sought to be even with time by allowing Margery to plan it. He erred every way, but did no harm, because Avis brought his letter back unopened in the evening.

"Grandmother says I'm to tell you she don't want any letters from you, father," she said.

He took his bulky packet.

"And is that all she said?" he asked.

"That's all."

"Did you see your mother, Avis?"

"Yes, I did. She's not well, and I'm not to say anything about her."

"This letter was as much for your grandfather as your grandmother," explained Jacob; "and if she won't read it, then he must."

"He won't read it if she tells him not to," answered Avis. "He's against you, same as everybody else is against you, father."

Jacob did not argue upon the subject, but after two days of silence, during which no communication or message reached him, he went into Brent and entered the post-office.

Barlow Huxam was behind the counter and he grew red and puffed his cheeks when he saw Jacob.

"This is very inconvenient," he said. "I wish you

wouldn't come here. Nothing can be gained—nothing whatever."

"I didn't want to come; but I wrote to Mrs. Huxam—a very vital letter which I imagined she would show to you. All she did was to return it to me unopened. That is senseless, because the position must be defined. We must know where we stand."

Barlow considered.

"It is defined," he answered. "Nothing could be more definite and we know where we stand very well. You heard with your ears I suppose—same as everybody else in court. Your case broke down and you became a laughing-stock to all honest men, and the judge summed up against you and told you the fearful truth about yourself, to which your own nature had long made you a stranger. The case was dismissed and you were left to pay the costs. That's all there is to it, Jacob Bullstone, and I suppose you don't want me or anybody else to tell you what follows."

"That's exactly what I do want you to tell me; and that you might be the better able to tell me, I wrote this letter, explaining how I stand to you and your wife and my wife. I have a right to ask you to read it, Mr. Huxam."

"Not at all," answered the other. "I don't grant you have any right to ask anything."

Judith entered the shop at this moment, perceived the men were talking and the woman in the postal department was listening.

"If you'll come through into the private room, Mr. Bullstone," she said, "it will be better."

She lifted a bridge in the counter and he, winning hope from her peaceful tone, followed into a room behind. Barlow accompanied them and explained to his wife.

"He says he's in his right we read his letter, and I deny it. He has no rights."

"Since he's forced himself here," she said in her quiet,

level voice, "he can listen, and then he can go. But speak he shall not to me. 'Rights!' What rights has a man who puts his wife away from him on a foul lie? What rights has a man who breaks up his home and drives his family to fly from him for their salvation? Let him understand this: he doesn't exist for us any more. We don't know him and don't dirty our lips, or our thoughts, with his name. Never—never, so long as any of us live. We're Christians here, and we have forgiven the awful wrong done against us, because well we know that our Maker called us to suffer it. And I see clear enough now why. But that's our affair, and if we endure evil that good may come, that's no reason why we should suffer the evil made flesh in the shape of this man. Far from it. We've forgiven before our God; but before our God also, we stand here and say we'll have no more truck with the source of our sufferings and shame. For us he is a nameless terror to fly from, as we fly from his master, the Devil."

"Is that forgiveness?" asked Bullstone.

"It has nothing to do with forgiveness. You are forgiven; but what comes after is our duty to our Creator, who orders us to avoid evil and all those damned to everlasting fire."

"Are you speaking for yourself alone?" he asked.

"No. I'm speaking for my husband and family—my children and my grandchildren. By the will of God a lost soul, such as you are, can be suffered to breed saved souls. That's a mystery; but so it happens. And when your children come of age, they'll be faced with their duty; and they'll see it very clear indeed. Now I'll ask you to go; and it will be better, when you have dealings with the post-office, to send a messenger and never come again yourself so long as we remain here."

She spoke slowly and without emotion. Jacob looked at his father-in-law.

"And do you say ditto to this devilish speech?" he asked.

"Ditto to every word of it," answered Barlow. "And so would any man who sees his wronged child wilting like a flower, and marks her bitter sufferings and ruined home and broken heart. And——"

"That's enough," interrupted Mrs. Huxam. "That's nothing to him. Tell him to go."

Jacob Bullstone did not speak and left the post-office immediately.

He began to grasp the situation at last, and surveyed his futile ambitions since the trial.

"Time won't be balked," he thought. "I was all wrong and stand worse off than when I started."

He determined on huge patience and felt where the fight must lie. Nothing was clear and nothing could be clear, until he saw his wife, face to face, without witnesses. Only a far future might open any such opportunity, even if she allowed him to take it when it came. His course seemed evident to him. He must contrive through some secret channel to learn what his wife was thinking and planning. But he doubted not that, unlike himself, her mind was still in flux and no anodyne deadening her resentment. Forgiveness, in any other than a religious sense, must be vain for many days.

He leapt from one extreme to the other, and having sought an understanding instantly, out of his instinctive rage for action, now told himself that years must pass before any light could be hoped. For a full twelve months he vowed to himself that he would not raise a finger. Half his savings had been swallowed up by the trial at law. He dwelt on the necessity for hard work and increase of business, to make good this serious loss. Work had proved a panacea on many occasions of past tribulation; work had helped time to stretch a gulf between former troubles and himself. He must fall back upon work now.

His punishment had begun and he prepared to welcome it, still trusting time to bring some Indian summer for his later days. He admitted the justice of long-drawn retri-

bution. It was right that an extended vengeance should be required. He welcomed it and bent his spirit to endure it, thus assuming a temporary pose and attitude which it was impossible that his character could sustain.

CHAPTER IV

AUNA TRIES

MARGERY BULLSTONE had never poured herself out and lost her stream in the river of her husband, after the fashion of certain devoted wives. She had loved him truly, generously, until time and chance and the wear and attrition of dissimilar natures fretted the love thin; but her own individuality persisted always, being maintained by the close touch which she kept with its sources: her parents and her old home. Without that forcible influence she might have merged more completely in Jacob and his interests; but her attitude to her mother had ever been one of great respect and reverence, and she implanted the same in her children, as they came to years of understanding. A different husband—one who saw life nearer her own vision—had, perhaps, won her completely to the diminishing of other and earlier influences; but Bullstone failed in this by his own limitations and oppositions; therefore when the culmination came and his deep-rooted sickness overthrew her home, Margery left Red House thankfully and regarded her liberty with relief.

She was sustained in this emotion until after the excitement of the trial, and everything, during the months before that event, contributed to support her spirit; but only a false activity is that of those who feed upon their wrongs; and when all was over and the business of her future life had to be faced, there came gusts of reaction to Margery and a realisation,—slow, fitful, painful—of the change for the worse. She caught herself looking back, and the alterations in her mental and physical life bore fruit.

She was as one suddenly widowed; but the inevitability brought by death and the sense of a common lot was not here to help her endure the bewildering dislocation and destruction. All that she had made was gone, and she was faced with the necessity to build up a new existence, differing in every condition from the old. Even peace was denied her. She could not think for herself, for every half-spoken thought was taken out of her lips and developed by her mother. She suffered domination, but found it a sorry substitute for her old independence. She could not be a child again. Only her own children were left, and from them, also, a new mind was demanded. But they were going on with their lives: her life had stopped, and none at present guessed the psychological significance of this sudden hiatus in Margery's existence.

She felt ill when she returned from London with her father, and having participated in her triumph, slowly sickened at the aspect of the future now presented and the convulsion created by dropping from a full life into an empty one. Her old physical weakness increased. A change was urged upon her by the village doctor, who had always attended her, and she went to stay with her uncle, Lawrence Pulleyblank, at Plymouth. But associations caused her to suffer so acutely here, that it was clear nothing could be gained by present sojourn in her uncle's house. She came back to Brent, and then fell the first shadow of implicit antagonisms between herself and her mother. For Judith contrived that Margery should not see her children alone upon their constant visits; while she sought opportunity to do so. Mrs. Huxam indeed felt little need to insist upon the condition, for she had no reason to doubt of her daughter's attitude. It was only a measure of precaution, and she had instilled the need for silence upon all of them. At present she detected no premonition of mental weakness in Margery and did not anticipate it. But her daughter's health was bad; she ate too little, shirked

exercise and remained melancholy, listless and indifferent. Judith held her state easy to understand, and had enough imagination to grant that it must be some time before Margery would regain nerve, courage and peace of mind; but that the woman, now idle and incapacitated, was looking back and dwelling in the past, Mrs. Huxam, though she might have granted, would not have regarded as likely. The past could offer no healing drought for Margery. She found easy present occupation, therefore, drew her daughter into the shop sometimes and contrived short errands for her. Then Barlow pointed out that to use Margery as though she were a child again was not seemly.

To her father, Jacob's wife talked in a way she would not have spoken before her mother. Indeed her rare moments of animation belonged to him, and he was glad to let her speak of the past and forget the future in so doing. She had aged and had grown indifferent to her appearance; but the old, good days could still charm her into forgetfulness, though from the pleasant memories, return to her new life always brought reaction. Her vitality grew less as her instinctive desire for a different environment increased.

It was now understood that Jacob Bullstone's name should not be spoken, and his children were directed neither to mention their father, when they came to the post-office, nor convey any information concerning their mother to Red House. Jacob accepted this arrangement, while Margery was also constrained to do so, since she did not see her children alone. John Henry abstained from Red House after his parents parted, but he saw his mother weekly and, of course, declared himself upon her side.

"And so is every one else," he told his grandmother; "and I feel shame for the first time in my life—shame to know I'm my father's son."

This attitude he openly confessed and it was not hidden from Bullstone.

In Barlow Huxam's presence Margery sometimes al-

lowed herself to speak of her husband. He flinched on the first occasion; but suffered it afterwards, perceiving that she won some twilight satisfaction from analysing the reason for her misfortune.

The new house rose rapidly and his daughter often accompanied the postmaster to see progress on summer evenings, when the day's work had ended and the labourers were gone.

At such times she indicated to him a little of the chaos of her present days and their lack of everything that had made life worthy to be lived.

"I was often sorry for myself," she said on one occasion, while they had sat to rest on a pile of red tiles for the new roof. "Sorry I was; yet now looking back, father, I can see that, for all its frets, I was leading a woman's full, bustling, busy life. Often it was good work, and the need to be planning and looking forward kept me hearty and strong. And now—all gone, and me turned so weak that I'm no more use to anybody."

He bade her fasten upon the future.

"You did your duty in all things, and you need feel no remorse about one hour of your married life," he said. "That's ended for no fault of yours, but through the disaster of marrying a dangerous madman—to call him no worse. Such lunatic men have often cut the throats of their innocent wives; but he done otherwise, and if he'd cut his own, he might have escaped a good deal that lies before him; and so might you. You must steadfastly fix before your mind that he has wronged you in the awfulest way a man can wrong a good wife; and you must also feel that, but for the mercy of God, worse things might well have happened to you. Put him out of your thoughts. Banish him as you would the vision of sin, Margery."

"Easy to say and easy to do sometimes; but not always," she answered. "The difficulties that you and mother think are curing themselves have hardly begun for me; because time works both ways. It lessens your pain; but it throws

a different light on the sources of your pain. Some women would never lose sight of the wrong and I haven't yet; but I'm weaker than a good many. You want to be strong, like mother, to hate for ever, and I can't built to do it."

"You must seek strength from your mother then," he answered. "She's got strength for us all, and she hates evil unsleepingly, because her mind is built on faith and justice and she looks out of eyes that never grow dim."

"Yes, I know. I love her. In some of my moods I see how grand she is; and in others I slink away, because, after all, there is such a thing as mercy. I've got time to think, and think nowadays as never I had before. There wasn't time to think in my married life, nor yet leisure to weigh things and stand outside them. I was in it all, and you can't weigh things if you are part of the reason why they happen. Now—torn away, or drove away—I can see Jacob better. He knew so little about real life and never seemed to want to know about it. I felt that Avis and John Henry had more sense of character and judged people truer than he could. He lived a very small life for choice, and it made him narrow and fostered this awful thing in him, till it grew up and wrecked him. He loved nature, but nature couldn't keep his mind sweet for long. And justice sometimes makes me see that what all looked such moonshine in the court, must have looked horribly real to him—before he rose and struck me."

"Because he was insane on that one subject and bent everything to that vile purpose."

"There it is!" she answered. "That's the point. If he was insane, as you say, then where do we stand? If those that are near and dear to us turned lepers to-morrow, should we fly from them? I feel a great deal has to be thought and said on that view, father; but I know nothing will come of it with mother, because she never changes. To her, madness is one thing and wickedness another; but grant madness, then there's no wickedness."

Mr. Huxam was a little startled before this attitude; for Margery had never yet indicated weakening, and these words clearly pointed in that direction.

"You're on dangerous ground and had better not pursue it," he answered. "We know where we stand, and when I said the man was a lunatic, I meant no more than a figure of speech. All sin may be madness seen one way; but we don't treat all sinners as madmen, else there'd be more ready to be locked up than we could find fellow-creatures to guard them. Your mother was right there—as usual. Forgive him as a Christian must; but don't keep twisting back to him in your mind. He's gone for ever; and if I thought, even in your dreams, that you could feel like going back to him, Margery, I should take a very grave view of such a fault."

"No, I wouldn't go back to him—any more than he could come back to me. For why should we think, because we won against him, that we've convinced him he was wrong?"

Mr. Huxam considered.

"We keep this subject from you, because our feeling is that it's very indecent and unbecoming and unworthy of the family to mention it," he answered, "but, since we're on it, through no choice of mine, my child, I must tell you once for all the latest facts. I'll ask you to keep what I'm going to say to yourself, for your mother might blame me to mention it; but men—even madmen—will talk, and you can't always command them to be silent, or refuse to hear what they desire to tell you. And Jacob Bullstone, in the ear of his old friend, William Marydrew, has acknowledged that he was wrong in every particular. He wrote after the trial—a letter which he first sent to your mother and then brought to the shop himself; and your mother saw him with me—for the last time—and refused to read the letter. I won't say I wouldn't have read it; but that's only to admit I haven't got the strength to judge right in a crisis like she has. But there's no

doubt that in that letter he said things we might, as Christians, have been glad to hear—for his own soul's sake."

"Mother was right, however," declared Margery, "and whether he ever could endure to see me, or whether he could not, it's very certain I must be myself in that matter. I hope to God he knows he was wrong and is convinced of it, but go back to him—I couldn't now; but—oh, I'm weak as well as strong. Jacob wasn't all, father. A husband isn't a home. I loved such a lot of little things. Being denied pleasure away, I made my first and dearest pleasure there, and I did so care for plants and trees and childish things. And the river and the hills—to me all such like meant a lot. The garden was work and play both. If smoothed the harsh edges. I made it and I made my children altogether. And the river and the hills meant love—for I loved them; and they helped me to love Jacob when I felt I never should again; because they brought back the old Jacob I fell in love with. All this sounds silly to you; but twenty years is a long time—the cream of my life—the greatest part of it for a woman, when she's reigning in her home and bringing her children into the world. Red House means more than I can say—everything—good and bad alike. To me it's like the shop to you—life. You know where to put your hand on everything. You could serve blindfold. And, if I went back to-day, I could shut my eyes and go to the flowers in the garden and know which were out and which were dead and which were in bud. And—but—no, no, no! It all means nothing now. I couldn't go back—never—never."

He soothed her, but felt considerable alarm himself before these confidences. For if Margery entertained such thoughts now—removed from her wrongs by only a few months—how might she regard the situation in a year, or two years? That she should even assert that she could not go back, argued most unexpected weakness in Mr.

Huxam's opinion, for when a woman was at the trouble to say she would not do a thing, that generally signified the action was by no means ruled out for her.

The stupendous thought of an ultimate condonation made him giddy—not before the spectacle of a forgiving Margery, but at the vision of Mrs. Huxam and the Everlasting.

He alluded to the latter.

“The Lord thy God is a jealous God—remember that, my child, when any shadow of regret for the past steals into your mind. It's time you braced yourself, Margery. I think you might begin working here in the new garden.”

But she shook her head.

“Not yet,” she said. “I'm not strong enough in mind or body yet. Flowers would hurt too much, father. I'm going to love your new house, and I'm going to live in it along with you; but flowers won't die. There's some flowers never can die for me, though they withered away a good few years ago. I shall always see them and smell them and hear the honey bees humming in 'em. But there are some I'll never touch no more.”

She was worn out after this conversation and Barlow hesitated long upon the propriety of discussing the matter with Judith; but he postponed any warning in that quarter. Margery had some return of her nervous weakness and was very silent for many days; while both parents exercised patience and Mrs. Huxam began to consider the desirability of definite steps. For her daughter's health and the doctor's anxiety pointed to the need of distraction and change.

Judith busied herself to learn Margery's view, but could win no expression or desire from her respecting her future. Then she went to Plymouth to consult her brother, Lawrence. It occurred to her that his niece might perhaps make her permanent abode with the old man and find a sphere of usefulness in ministering to him.

Thus it fell out that, for once, Margery did win oppor-

tunity for a long conversation with a child; and it happened to be the one child who regarded no ground as forbidden, and rejoiced at the chance to say things with which her young heart was full.

Auna came and brought a large can full of the famous goats' milk; nor had her grandfather the heart to prevent her from carrying it to her mother, though his conscience reproached him afterwards.

To Margery came Auna and brightened at the unexpected freedom, while her mother drank at the child's command and shut her eyes that the familiar flavour of the milk might bring a thousand pictures to her mind. The visions began happily. Then they ended in darkness—on a February day, when seeking the goats, she had met with her husband hidden on the hill. For thus it was with all her memories; they were prone to break off in a sorrow. Every train of thought ran into grief—and stopped there; and she told herself that this must be surely so, since life itself had now run into grief and stopped. She knew well enough, at the bottom of her heart, that she could never begin again and start a new existence. Some women might have been strong enough to do so. Pride might have driven many to build up a new fabric; some, out of natural energy, physical strength and fulness of life, might have survived; but she could not. Nothing that waited for her would be of a zest to make like worth living; and yet she spoke the truth when she told her father that she would not return to Red House. That she firmly believed; nor could she conceive of any circumstance to change the determination.

Auna struck a new note on the occasion of this visit and she was very frank and clear about it.

"There's always a terrible lot in me I can't say afore grandmother," she declared; "and I don't know whether it's right, or whether it's wicked, mother; but I'm never going to stop loving father and I won't pretend different. Nobody knows how wicked he's been better than poor father

does, and his sins properly choke him when he's along with me sometimes. And——"

"Don't you talk about father, Auna. That's forbid and you know it. We've all forgiven each other and you'll understand better some day."

"But he doesn't understand you've forgiven him. Nobody's told him you have. But I shall, now you've said it. And I'm just going to be fifteen year old and I do understand. Father thought you'd done something wicked and that was wicked of him, because he ought to have known very well you couldn't do nothing wicked. But he thought you had so cruel certain, that it all had to be tried by a judge. And then father found out he'd thought wrong; and now his hair be turning grey about it and he can't lift up his head from looking at the ground. And if he knew how to show more sorrow than he does show, he would—I know he would."

"Leave him, Auna. But be sure to tell him I've forgiven him. And say I'm going to drink the milk. And now talk about something different. I bid you, Auna."

"Very well, then, dear mother," said the girl. "Peter be going to the veterinary surgeon to Exeter for six months soon now, to learn all about the sicknesses that come over dogs; and then father says he'll know everything there is to the dogs, and more than he does himself. Though that Peter never will. And Avis—Robert's terrible set on marrying her, and he's coming to ax father if he may do so this very night. But that's a secret hidden from father. And father——"

The child could not keep her father off her tongue.

"Tell me about the dogs and the river and the garden," said Margery.

Auna collected her thoughts.

"The dogs are very well indeed and a lot of new puppies, and 'The Lord of Red House' be the father of them; and Peter says their paws promise them to be grand dogs. And Mr. Middleweek, the new man since Mr. Gill went,

is very different from him. He never whines and never says the work's killing him, nor cusses the goats, nor anything like that. And Peter says he's very clever with the dogs, but won't come to no good in the next world, because he haven't found God. But Peter says that what Mr. Middleweek does about the next world is his own business, and he won't quarrel with him as long as he does so clever what he's got to do in this world."

"Peter's a lot with the dogs now?" asked Margery, and her daughter answered that he was.

"And the river's lovelier than ever this year," she ran on—"especially the little island we call 'Mother's Island,' where Avis found that white bluebell. And it came up again this year. And your own garden, mother, is a proper show of flowers. And the roots you planted in the fall have come up, all but one or two. And the red peony seemed to know you wasn't going to be there and he haven't took the trouble to flower at all this year."

She ran on and Margery listened, saying very little but smiling once or twice.

She asked a few questions about trifles that interested her and Auna answered or promised to learn the answers.

Then they joined Mr. Huxam in his parlour behind the shop and took tea together. Auna discussed Jeremy and Jane. She was very interested in their two infant boys and much cast down because the second proved to be delicate.

Margery remembered a book or two and Auna promised to bring them, but Barlow forbade it.

"Not at present," he said. "That would be to create a doubtful precedent. We'd better wait for anything like that, unless the book was yours before you married."

Her grandfather was acutely conscious of the difficulties attending the situation of Auna. Margery's other children continued to be entirely identified with her, and Judith felt satisfied that soon enough they would have broken with the evil influence that begot them; but Auna had

developed a decision that remained to be dealt with. She came and went, and not seldom mentioned her father from force of habit, only to be corrected for so doing. Her grandmother already perceived a problem here, but trusted herself to solve it.

When Mr. Huxam had gone and they were alone again, the girl returned to her father.

"I know I mustn't name him to grandfather and grandmother, but just once more you'll let me, mother. Say just once."

"What's the use, child? You must learn to understand that father's gone out of my life. He hasn't gone out of yours. He's part of yours, and I'm glad you love him, because there's only you to do that now. But grandmother's quite right to ask you not to mention father any more here."

"Why?" asked Auna. "Father doesn't tell me not to talk about you. He loves me to do it."

"Anyway you'll do what you're told to do here, I know."

"Very well then—this is the last—last time I'll name him. And if he ever slips out again, it will be an accident, mother. But—the last time, mind—but, don't you think just once—just once, for a little moment, you could see him? You've got such a lot of time on your hands now and you might take a walk and just——"

"Did he ask you to ask me, Auna?"

"Not exactly asked me. He said it would be a great blessing and a sign he was forgiven if you could let him speak to you but once. And I said so it would; and I told him that first time I got a chance, behind grandmother's back, I'd ask you. And oh, mother, why not?"

"For countless reasons, Auna. You'll tell him I've forgiven him. We've long passed the forgiving stage here. Everybody has forgiven father. And what more is there?"

"There's father."

"I mustn't do it. I don't want to do it, Auna. You

can't understand yet, but you will when you're older. He will understand."

"You don't want to see father?"

"No, no, no—I don't want to see him again. I've suffered enough."

Auna was very quiet for some time.

"You wouldn't like to come and see your lovely garden, if father promised to go up to Huntingdon for the day?" she asked. "Surely, mother, you'd like to see the dogs and your garden?"

"It's not my garden any more. I've got no garden. I've got nothing but you and Avis and the boys."

Auna tried again.

"How sorry must he feel, before you can forgive him enough to see him?" she asked.

"I have forgiven him. I wish I could make your little mind grasp it, Auna. I know father better than you do. I know how sorry he is; but sorrow can't undo what's done. Nothing could be gained if I saw father, and a great deal must be lost. There are others to think of. We are all in God's Hands. Now you ought to be trotting home."

"God's Hands are cold comfort if you won't see father," murmured the child. "I don't much like what I hear about God from Mr. Middleweek."

Margery reproved her.

"If you want to hear about God, go to your grandmother," she said, "and never listen to anybody else. You ought to know that well enough, Auna."

"I shall always listen to father whenever he talks to me," answered the girl. "And I've told father that I well know God's forgiven him."

She left soon afterwards, very quietly and much depressed, while Margery speculated on the situation and became aware that, against the forces of right and justice and religion, destined to stand between her husband and herself for the remainder of their lives, there would be opposed a girl's will. She saw a time when her daughter

would be called to choose; and she was glad that Auna would most certainly fling in her lot with Jacob. She still believed, with her mother, that souls were involved, and, therefore, felt it guilty to be glad.

And Bullstone, knowing that the child might to-day get free speech with Margery, had not slept for two nights until the result of Auna's effort reached him. He had not directed her to do this, but he could not forbid it. The inspiration was hers and he believed that it came from something greater than Auna. He walked to meet her and his heart beat hard as her slight figure came swinging along through the lane beyond Shipley Farm.

She kissed him and he waited for her to speak as they walked homeward together; but she did not speak for a little while. Then she told the best thing she had to tell.

"Mother's going to drink the milk, father."

"Tell me," he answered. "Don't hold it back. Can she see me?"

"No, father."

"Does she want to see me?"

Auna hesitated, then spoke.

"No, father."

Then they walked together quite silently until something happened to distract their thoughts. A quick step overtook them beside the river and Robert Elvin, his day's work done, saluted them.

"Thought I might get over for a bite of supper, Mr. Bullstone, because I was very wishful to have a word or two."

"And welcome, Bob. How's things?"

"All right—all very right I believe. I'd like for you to see the mangolds. The rain have fetched them up proper and the guano be doing wonders. So it is at Bullstone John Henry tells me."

That night after the evening meal, Bob approached his future father-in-law on the great theme and begged to marry Avis within the year.

Robert was a little independent—so his listener thought.

“My mother sees nothing against it and Avis is willing,” he said, “so I hope it may happen by your leave, Mr. Bullstone.”

Jacob, morbid now in the presence of other people, detected, or imagined that he detected, a changed note in all who accosted him. And often he did do so, for a great weight of censure had rolled in upon him since his error and many derived a sense of personal right doing and right thinking when they said the obvious things concerning him. But the significance of what he had done did not oppress the younger generation since they had no experience of life to weigh its implications. Robert was too busy about his own affairs to trouble concerning the misfortunes of other folk. He had no intention to be anything but respectful.

“If Avis is agreeable, as you say, then so it shall be, Bob,” promised Jacob. Indeed the idea had already dwelt in his mind for other reasons than the happiness of young Elvin. In the ceaseless examination of all paths, in the pursuit of every faint thread which might lead to the heart of his hopes, Bullstone had not neglected the matter of his daughter’s marriage. For there, if only for a moment in time, he might possibly hope to meet on common ground with the mother of Avis. He told himself that humanity would pardon a natural and seemly meeting on the occasion of a child’s marriage. None could protest at that; and while he knew, and smarted to know, that many held his desire—to receive back his wronged wife—as only another offence; while, indeed, brutally faced in certain, unexpected quarters with harsh censure, when he had confided, as he thought, in sympathetic ears; and while consequently driven to lock his hopes out of sight, since they were held shameless, yet in the matter of Avis, he did see an opportunity against which it would be hard to take exception. The girl must marry from her father’s home; was it too much to hope that her mother would see a way

to come under his roof on the occasion, if only for an hour? By night the possibility seemed to take substance; by day, when his mind was clearer, it faded; and to-night, though he spoke amiably to Robert and promised the wedding should take place after the harvest, he felt less sanguine than usual. He had expected this interview and desired it; he had fancied it would cheer him and bring some hope, but now that it had come, the light was quenched in anticipation by what he had just heard from Auna.

Yet he struck a cheerful note, and it was not Jacob but Avis who viewed the matter differently, and brought him back to the fact that the past was not to be missed even in this matter. Robert called her when he heard that they might wed, and she came into the kitchen, where her father sat, and thanked him. Jacob declared his good pleasure.

"And we'll do it in style I promise you," he said with ill-feigned ardour. "You shall have a good send-off, and a good honeymoon, too, before you start life in double harness."

"And after our marriage, you're going to settle Owley on me, aren't you, father?" asked Avis. "I don't ask for inquisitiveness, but only so as we shall know how we stand."

"Yes, I am. That was a promise. And I'll add this: that I shall waive the rent as soon as ever I see my way clear."

"Not from the start, however?" asked Bob.

"Not from the start—no. Circumstances have called upon me for a good deal of money lately and—however, the future's yours. Whatever else they haven't got, the young have always the future."

Avis looked uncomfortable, feeling that the present was the time to speak concerning details. She was sorry for herself and suffered a disappointment which to one of her nature did not lack for edge. She had dreamed of a very fine wedding indeed, but had been told by her grandmother

that any such hope would have to be abandoned. The fact she now declared, and her regret lent unconscious tartness to her speech.

"I can't have a gay wedding, father, and no doubt you know why. You wouldn't have a gay wedding with a death in the house, and what's happened is a long way worse than that."

She repeated a speech that she had heard from her grandmother on the same subject, and Jacob stared, but did not answer.

"That's the worst of a thing like what you've done, father. It don't stop where it belongs, and my wedding's got to suffer with everything else."

Her father flushed, but he restrained himself and she stung on.

"You was always such a man for peace, and now you'll soon have it—that's something."

Then Robert spoke. The ill-temper of Avis was a surprise to him.

"Have done," he said. "I don't want to hear you lecture your father."

He spoke rather sternly and Jacob answered him.

"Better stand up for her, not me, Bob. You'll soon know which side your bread's buttered with my fine Avis. The wedding shall be as she pleases."

Then he left them and they went out into the twilight together, Avis a little alarmed.

She was soon forgiven, for she elaborated her grievance and explained to Robert how the disaster that had overtaken Red House, wrecked not only her mother's life, but cast its shadow over her own. She pretended more than she felt and he consoled her as best he might, for he was much in love and shared her regrets at the passing misfortune, but broke away from it to their own surer future.

"There's a screw loose in such a lot of married people," he said. "Don't think I haven't seen it. It was under

my eyes while my father was fighting death. Thank God you and me are different. We know each other's natures down to the quick, and nothing could ever rise up against love like ours."

Elsewhere Jacob mused over his recent experience.

"She's grown up," he reflected. "No doubt a moment in time comes like that, when a man's child, that he still held to be a child, flings off childhood and stands out before him full-fledged man, or woman. And for certain the shock, when it falls, is oftener painful than not."

He considered how this apotheosis of his elder daughter might have hurt him once, though little likely to surprise him. But now it lacked all power to hurt and left him indifferent. She was gone in spirit long ago; and John Henry was gone; and Peter thought more of George Middleweek's opinions than of his. Yet how trivial were these losses and dismemberments now. For life, like the sleight of sun and shadow on hills and valleys, had cast down and lifted up, had transformed the shifting scenery of his existence, so that things before invisible stared out upon him and the old landmarks and comfortable places, the nook and dingle, the blue hill and music-making waters, were obliterated and blotted from the theatre in which he moved. Light glared pitiless where shadows had mercifully spread; gloom threw a pall over what had seemed most stable, most gracious and assured. Did the dogs look at him with the old adoration in their eyes? Was it possible that the miasma he trailed could miss their sensitive nostrils? He often hungered for Huntingdon and the white, squab house under the sycamores; but he put the thought from him as a weakness. Not there homed reality; not there could he perform his penance, or justify the undying hope that still burned up and, with its flickering promise, faintly revived the old images and fought the new darkness that hung heavy upon them.

CHAPTER V

REVENGE

Now opportunity thrust another into the affairs of Jacob Bullstone—one who never occupied a moment of his own thoughts, but who, none the less, was deeply concerned with him.

Unknown and unguessed by his brother, or his aunt, Samuel Winter's weak brain was suffering a stormy assault and gradually reaching a very dangerous decision on the subject of his brother's wrongs. Affairs that leapt instantly to the zenith in a normal intellect, mounted by slow degrees for him; thus his purpose only matured long after the summits of emotion in other men and women were passed. He had taken the matter of Adam's affront very much to heart, and while scarcely able to appreciate the details or understand their significance, none the less grasped that the master of Red House had done Adam an injury beyond any atonement. He had listened to his aunt's furious comments on the disaster and shared her indignation; he had perceived that, while unspeakable evil resulted from Bullstone's errors, the criminal went unrestrained and apparently unpunished. This he resented. Samuel's theory of justice embraced active retaliation for wrong done, and he held it a grievance that Jacob should be none the worse after his offences. He found the matter fasten on his waking thoughts; and he harboured dreams of a great revenge that should be worthy of the occasion. While the rest of the world had cooled its anger; while even a shadow of regret for both sufferers appeared here and there, doubtfully uttered by a seeing

woman or sentimental man, Samuel reached gradually to the climax of his private hate. Bullstone must be struck hard, and from this conviction, all unknown and unguessed, Sammy's faulty wits led him to a still more tremendous conclusion. Long brooding, and a gathering weight of indignation at the injustice of Jacob's escape, decided the crazy creature to destroy him and rid the world of an evil thing. He would kill the enemy as he killed vermin. Thus a grave, physical peril now hung over Bullstone, and there was none to warn him, since Samuel took care that not a whisper of his project should be heard. He had the wit to guess that his brother might condemn it; but believed notwithstanding that, after the event, Adam must be the first to praise.

At this stage in his remorseless progress, chance lent itself to Samuel's purpose and he accepted an opportunity. For once the muddy currents of his intelligence flowed swiftly and he struck, after a fashion more worthy of a knave than a fool.

Jacob Bullstone, exploring every channel and considering each human figure that might be regarded as a link between himself and his wife, had thought of late upon her brother. He had observed that Jeremy now avoided him and, until the present, had not thought to challenge the younger man, or thrust any needless difficulty upon his life; but there came a sudden conviction that through his brother-in-law a possible approach to Margery might be obtained. He yearned to put circumstances before her and had endeavoured to do so by letter; but the letters were returned by the hand of Auna, and when the girl once more visited her mother with messages, she was told very plainly that she must obey former commands and not mention her father again. Failure to keep this order would mean denial of her mother to her.

Bullstone, considering ways and means, desired to furnish Margery with money, and his lawyer assured him that there existed no objection to so doing. He was impoverished

himself and knew well enough that his wife would take nothing from him, yet the thought persisted, among other thoughts, and he strove to create from it, if possible, some sort of tie between himself and his partner. He told himself that if once the slenderest thread of communication might be established and recognised, upon that he would build and build, until something vital were accomplished.

Therefore he turned to Jeremy. He did not go to the green-grocer's, but waited a chance meeting, and when that fell out, in a manner very convenient to the purpose, he stopped the other and, to Jeremy's discomfort, insisted on having speech with him. Huxam had been to see some apples with a view to purchasing them on the trees, and he was returning from an orchard in the valley above Brent, when he met Jacob face to face, in a lane, and found it impossible to avoid him. He was hastening past, with his face turned to the ground, when his brother-in-law blocked the way.

"Well met," he said. "I've been wanting half a dozen words with you, Jeremy. I won't keep you. I'll walk along with you."

"Mr. Bullstone," answered the other, "I'd rather you didn't. It's all over between your family and mine, and I earnestly beg you'll not speak to me."

"I must. You must endure it. I suppose you're a just man. I'm not going to say anything on my own account—only on your sister's. She has rights and I have obligations. These must be recognised; but your parents come between me and my duty in that matter and won't listen to me, or my lawyer, though he's tried to make them. They oppose a blank wall to me out of ignorance. Some might say out of malice; but I say out of ignorance."

"What d'you want to rip things up for? It isn't dignified of you to stop me; you ought to know better."

"Dignity don't come into it. Just listen. I've been a good friend to you anyway. You're not going to deny

that. Then treat me as an unfortunate man who comes to you quite reasonably and properly, things being as they are. There's much that must be said, and propositions must be heard, and it may be in your power to help Margery to see another opinion than her mother's—not my opinion, but the law's opinion. You understand money and you know what a husband owes his wife, whether he's wronged her or not. I admit everything; I acknowledge everything and none can make me out worse than I am; but I'm human. I want to do what's right, and no Christian ought to deny me the power to do what's right. Everything I've got is my wife's if she will take it. She's living on her father and mother now. They won't even suffer her to have her clothes."

"It's no business of mine," said Jeremy. "All the same, I see what you mean. If I get a chance, I'll speak to her. I'm cruel sorry about all this. It's become a matter of religion in my mother's mind, or else things might be possible I dare say."

"No religion denies a man the right to do his duty, whatever he's been."

"I'll mention it and see how she looks at it. Not that you can expect any of us to trouble about you, or your duty either. No member of my family ever stood between a man and his duty, all the same. My parents may not have looked at it in that light. Money's money every time. If I don't know that, who should?"

"It is her money and her children's after her."

The other considered.

"Strictly between ourselves," he said, "I may tell you I don't see quite eye to eye with my mother in this affair. Men take a larger view than women and, of course, there's two sides to every question. My parents are getting on and, in the course of nature—well, as far as Margery's concerned she's provided for; but I am not. You've got to be worldly-wise with a wife and family and—in a word, nothing is yet settled about me and Jane. My mother's

been far too upset by these disasters to think about us. But the time has come when we've got to be thought about. Yes, I'll talk to Margery. She may not look at it exactly like mother. Jane says that Margery doesn't. I don't know. I seldom see her. And—well, they talk of going into their villa residence at the end of the year; and nothing settled about the business. To forgive is human after all. There's somebody coming. You'd better turn here, afore they see who it is. I'll keep it in mind. I'll get speech with her next time she comes to see us, and try to find if she feels anything in particular."

"On the general question—not only money—the general question of a possible reconciliation. Thank you gratefully."

Jeremy quickened his pace, and Jacob stopped and turned back. He guessed that the other had become thus amenable through some private inspiration bearing on his own welfare; but the motive mattered not. He had said great things—words beyond measure heartening to Jacob. For, if Margery did not echo her mother; if Jane had actually recorded that important fact, then hope surely existed. That being so, let him but break down one of the barriers, and the rest might presently fall. He believed that much might come of this meeting, if Jeremy kept his promise, and for a time the thought exalted him.

In this mood he passed Samuel Winter returning home with 'Turk.' Before them opened a field over which ran a footpath—a short cut to Shipley Bridge—and Jacob, though Samuel never now acknowledged him save with a snort and a scowl, held open the gate for the bull and wished the man good evening.

He received no response, however, beyond an unfriendly gleam from Sammy's heavy eyes; then he pushed on to cross the meadow, and quickly forgot Adam's brother under the weight of his own thoughts. He was, however, speedily reminded. The meadow extended for two hundred yards, with the river, under a steep bank, on the west

of it, and a stone wall, where ran the road, to the east. Road and river met at Shipley Bridge and here the field narrowed to a point, where stood another gate for cattle and carts, and a stile for foot passengers.

Then it was that Sammy walking thirty yards behind Jacob won his inspiration and acted upon it, with lightning rapidity. The supreme enemy stood at his mercy for one minute, and between them stalked a formidable engine of destruction. Samuel well knew what to do, for he remembered once how a man, flinging away a lucifer match at a show, had dropped it on 'Turk's' neck, and how the bull had behaved on that occasion. He was firmly tethered at the time, otherwise some lives had paid forfeit. Now Samuel shook out his pipe upon the monster's back and loosed the rope from the ring in his nose. The fire stung and 'Turk' responded. His head went up. He was conscious of assault and, at the same time, perceived a man thirty yards ahead of him. He protested audibly, to Samuel's regret, then put down his head and in a royal rage charged the unconscious Jacob, where he walked deep in thought. But for the shrill, warning bellow of the beast, he had been doomed and must have been struck almost at the moment he became conscious of the peril; but he heard, looked round, saw the angry bull and its keeper, and, with a start of thirty yards, began to run. His legs, however, could not save him and he hesitated, while he ran, as to whether the wall or the river promised the better chance. He stood midway between them and decided for the stream, since once over the bank he would be safe, while at the wall he must needs lose vital moments before he could climb it. The bull was very near—nearer than he knew—and Jacob unconsciously saved himself by a sudden swerve to the left, for as he twisted, his enemy went past so close that its left, lowered horn tore his breeches. He still had near thirty yards to go and the bull pulled up and doubled almost as fast as the man; but now, alive to his danger, Jacob ran amazingly fast for one of his

age and size. He took a straight line to the river and just reached the bank two yards before his pursuer. He plunged straight on, ignorant of what might be beneath and 'Turk' stopped with his fore feet on the brink. There he trampled and screamed, but was unsighted and did not mark the enemy, who had fallen through a thicket of alder overhanging the river a dozen feet below.

Bullstone might have escaped with nothing but a wetting and bad shaking, but for the unfortunate accident of a dead tree stump. This heavy snag extended over a pool and he fell across it and turned a somersault into six feet of water. He had, however, struck the tree trunk with his right leg and broken his thigh. He heard the snap and knew that a bone was gone; but he kept his nerve and, guessing that the bull had been set upon him, could not tell whether Samuel Winter might not descend and finish the murder he had planned. He stopped in the water therefore and floating down with the stream, holding himself up by the bank, reached the cover of an overhanging ledge and remained beneath it motionless.

Samuel, however, was content with his achievement. He looked over, saw no sign of the enemy, doubted not that he was drowned and roared with laughter. Then he turned to the heaving bull, slapped its neck, kissed its nose, and heaped affectionate curses upon it. Presently, thrusting his rope through the monster's ring, he led it away.

Jacob heard him go, but found that without the water to support him he could not stand. His leg was powerless and he felt the broken bone probing the flesh. He crawled out on the farther bank of the river and lay flat. He felt faint at the unfamiliar exertion and suffered pain also; but he waited for some time, not daring to lift his voice until Samuel might be out of hearing. The terrible incident seemed not particularly dreadful to him. Sudden death offered no terrors; yet he was thankful to live, for he desired much to happen before he died. Death, indeed, might be already upon him, for he felt very ill; but his

mind remained clear. He could find it in him to sorrow for Adam Winter before this disaster. This would bring more suffering upon him, for the madman might have to be shut up.

It was thanks to Samuel himself that the broken man endured but a short suspense. Jacob had determined to raise no alarm until good space of time had passed; and before he lifted his voice assistance came, for Samuel, returning home in great glee, put up the bull, then told his aunt of the adventure.

"I've done for the beastly man," he said. "Bully went for him and horched his thigh and just missed him by a hair, then he ran for the river and Turk after him like a long-dog,¹ and in went Bullstone, tail over head, and was drowned, thank the watching Lord! A good day's work and may I never do a worse."

Amelia listened and took good care not to condemn Samuel, for censure was gall to him. She left him at his tea a moment later and ran for Adam, who was milking. Thus it happened that within half an hour of his downfall, Jacob saw Winter running over the field, heard his shout and answered him.

In less than another half hour Adam had brought round a flat-bottomed pig-cart with blankets and pillows. Two men assisted him and Bullstone was lifted as gently as might be. Then Winter himself drove the injured man to Brent cottage hospital, while a labourer proceeded to Red House with the news.

¹ *Long-dog*—Greyhound.

CHAPTER VI

THE WITCH DOCTOR

JACOB'S illness followed a straightforward and satisfactory course. It offered no marked features and awoke interest rather for its cause, than itself, or the sufferer. A week after he was known to be on the way to recovery, his wife went to see her brother. Jeremy had, after the accident, kept his mouth shut and taken no steps to advance her husband's hopes, but to-day Margery herself spoke such words as none had yet heard from her.

Bullstone's disastrous adventure did not lack for dramatic telling in Auna's version. For once she demanded to speak of her father, and she quickened her description with many tears. Nor could the event fail to deepen Margery's own emotions. She was not built to maintain an obdurate attitude to any experience, and whatever her present angle of vision, after speech with her mother, her spirit quickened and her flesh yearned. There seemed only one place for her at this time; and that was at her husband's bedside; there offered only one seemly channel of duty: to be nursing him. Life was short. She hungered terribly for an understanding and sympathetic spirit to help her at this crisis, and found that, after all, despite the tragedy of his long outrage and cruel assault, her husband was still nearest, and still quickest to reach the depths of her. Then thought, advancing upon this conviction, painted a new and another Jacob. She was aware that the whole world set sternly against him and, misreading the attempted murder, suspected that, perhaps, even Adam Winter might not have forgiven him. Surely

it must have been some fiery word from Adam that prompted Samuel to his attempt. Yet there she hesitated and, on second thoughts, remembered Adam better. Doubtless he had pardoned long ago; but mad Samuel none the less echoed the people, and she knew, from what her father had told her, that the country side was more interested in Jacob's disaster than regretful of it. Their sole regret went out for the brother and the aunt of the man responsible.

Now, despondent and bewildered, Margery found some comfort in talking openly to her brother and his wife.

She took tea with them on a Sunday and was unguarded and indifferent as to what they might say, or think, of her opinion. They perceived the change in her and set it down to Jacob's situation; but though that had largely served to stimulate Margery and offer a point for argument with her parents, it did not account for the radical and growing operations of her soul. The inevitable had happened, and with all its sorrows and trials, she yet wanted back her life as it was, sanctified to her by custom. She yearned for the home that she had made and her spirit could rise to no other. She was changed, weakened a little mentally, as well as much physically, by her experiences, more frightened of life and less desirous to face it. Now she longed only for quiet—to be secluded and hidden away, forgotten and left alone. She did not dread solitude, silence, peace any more. She desired them before all things and wearied inexpressibly of the noise of the street, the bustle of business and the din of activity round about her. Among the many facts learned with increasing certainty, was the assurance that she would soon sicken and die, cooped here under the eyes of her parents—an object of pity for her father, of triumph for Judith.

These convictions she voiced to Jane, and whimsically lamented that situation which all just persons supposed she was most thankful to have escaped for ever.

“Time blots out the bad and leaves the good still to re-

mind you," she said. "You may not believe it, but it is so. I always remember the happy things and slip the unhappy. It's not only things that happen, but people that made them happen. Get far enough away from people, and you find the parts in them you hate grow dimmer and the parts you like grow brighter. That's why the natural feeling is to speak kindly of the dead. We generally feel kindly to them. At least I do."

"It's true," declared Jane. "When anybody's dead, part of 'em always rises up again on people's tongues, and we don't speak well of them who are dead only because they are dead and can't defend themselves, but because time, as you say, Margery, keeps the good and lets the bad go. I can say it to you and Jeremy, though I wouldn't to anybody else. Take your own mother. I always feel ever so much kinder to her when I escape from hearing her, or seeing her for a week or so."

"You oughtn't to say that, Jane," declared her husband. "It's a very doubtful speech."

"Not it," she answered. "No use pretending. You don't see your mother like the rest of the world, because she don't see you like the rest of the world. And Margery's right. If she don't know, who should?"

"Ask yourself, Jane. You're married and have got plenty of sense to see things. Suppose Jeremy and you was parted for some great, terrible deed done by him: a bee in Jeremy's bonnet, for which he was sorry enough. And suppose, with time, you hadn't only forgiven him, as a Christian, but really and truly, as a wife and a woman. And suppose everything—everything that had made your life, and that you'd made of your life, was taken away, and you were left stranded. What would it be to you?"

"Hell," said Jane frankly. "There's no other word for it."

"And what would you do, Jeremy, if that had happened to you?" continued his sister. "Would you feel that, for her soul's sake, Jane must never come back to you?"

"I'm glad to say no such thing could happen to me, and it's idle worrying to think what you'd do if a thing happened that can't happen," answered the man. "And now you're here, it will be good for you to get away from your own vexations for a bit and lend a hand with mine. And first I may tell you that I've seen your husband that was."

"Seen him? Oh, Jeremy!"

"Keep it dark. I didn't seek him. He cornered me and would talk. Don't think I yielded about it. Not at all. I was firm as a rock with him, because, of course, mother's dead right in that matter; but there it is. Jacob Bullstone was very wishful indeed to get into touch with you, and seemed to think he had a right. But I hit out from the shoulder fearlessly, and he heard my honest opinion of him and so on. However, I'm a man of the world notwithstanding, and nobody knows how difficult the world is better than I do. So up to a certain point and, well within my conscience, I may do as I'm done by in the matter."

Margery regarded him with parted lips.

"He wants to see me?"

"I was the last to have speech with him before he was smashed, and there's no doubt he had a near squeak of his life. I remember Amelia Winter telling me years ago, when I was a huckster, that in the case of Samuel Winter, as a young child, it was a great question whether he'd turn out amazingly clever, or weak in his head. Unfortunately he proved one of the Lord's own, and now, since this business, Adam feels it a difficult question whether Sammy didn't ought to be put away. Why I tell you this is because I'm coming to the point, and that is our mother's fine rule of life that nothing happens by chance."

"Go on," said Margery.

"Well, granted nothing happens by chance, then we've got the satisfaction of knowing we are doing Heaven's will from morning till night. Therefore, if you help me in a vital matter and I help you in a vital matter, we're

both doing Heaven's will; and whatever came of it, mother would be the first to confess it was so."

"Lord, Jeremy!" cried Jane. "D'you mean to say——"

"I mustn't come into it," explained Jeremy. "I don't say I'll lift a hand; but I do say that, if it was established that Jane and I go to the post-office when the old people retire, I should feel a great deal clearer in my mind and kinder to the world at large. It is high time I had a bit of light on that subject, and I'm a good deal puzzled the light hasn't shone. I've been hoping a long time to hear we was to go in, and so I feel that you might find good and useful work ready to your hand in that matter, Margery. And—and one good turn deserves another. That's well within a clear conscience."

"A 'good' turn—yes," declared Jane doubtfully.

"It would be a good turn if I decide to help Margery, because we must all do as the Lord intends, and therefore it couldn't be a bad one," explained the casuist. "In a word, if Margery impressed upon mother that the right and proper thing was to trust the business and the post-office to us, that might determine the point. As a matter of fact I'm uneasy. Father's been into Plymouth more than once of late and, of course, they're looking ahead. They always do."

"They are," answered Margery, "and I'll tell you something. Mother wants you and Jane to take over the business—under father. And father, seeing you've never stuck to nothing in your life, feels very doubtful if you're the man. They differ."

"Just as I thought," murmured Jeremy, "and some people might be vexed with their fathers; but that's only to waste time. So there it is. You're all powerful with father—eh, Margery?—and surely to God you know Jane and me well enough to know mother is right."

Margery perceived the nature of the bargain. She believed with Jeremy that their father was to be won. Indeed he sometimes came near yielding to Judith's stead-

fast conviction. She might very possibly settle the point in her brother's favour; but what could he do for her? Nothing with her parents. The problems that had looked vague and, indeed, had never been considered in her mind before, now rose and began to take a definite shape. Until now nothing but a dim, undefined desire for something that must not be—for something her parents held unthinkable—had stolen through her mind and settled over it, like a sad fog. She had accepted the situation and supposed that the craving for some return to vanished conditions was at best weakness, at worst evil. Yet now she had moved beyond that point to an acute nostalgia. Jacob's tribulation was augmented by the startling news that he desired to see her. She found comfort in Jeremy's sophistries, but knew, even while he uttered them in his mother's words, that they echoed anything but his mother's spirit. Jeremy was a humbug, as charming people are so apt to be; but the fact still remained: nothing happened but what Providence planned.

She began to think of details and they made her giddy. To move from secret wishes to open words was enough for one day. She had never dared to be so explicit, and her confession in the ear of sympathetic Jane comforted her. But her constitutional timidity, developed much of late, now drew her in.

What could Jeremy do? Deeds were not in Jeremy's line. Time must pass. Jacob must get well again—then, perhaps—she would see how she felt then. He might change his mind. Possibly he only wanted to mention some trifle. Margery doubted whether her present emotions were healthy or dangerous; then she fell back on her brother's affairs.

"You've given me something to think about; and I will think of it," she said.

"And Jeremy shall think of what you've told us," promised Jane, "for I'll remind him to do so."

"The thing is the greatest good to the greatest number,"

declared Jeremy. "That's always been my rule and always will be. And clearly the greatest good to me and my wife and children lies at the post-office. Others see it beside us. As for your greatest good, Margery—that's a very difficult question."

"I know it. I hope I haven't said too much; but you'll forgive me if I have. I feel—I feel, somehow, that I ought to see my husband, if he still wishes it."

"You would," answered Jane, "and so would any nice woman feel the same."

"That's the point," argued Jeremy. "You may be right, or you may be wrong. But the general opinion is that you show what a fine creature you are by keeping away from him. Why don't you put it to mother?"

"Put it to a man," advised Jane. "Ax parson. It's a free country and though we're all Chosen Fews, that don't prevent parson from being a very sensible chap. Or, if you don't like the thought of him, try somebody else."

But Margery gave no promise. She went home vaguely heartened and determined at least to work for Jeremy. She felt, indeed, that what he desired would be sure to happen presently without any word from her; still to work for him was good. She had nobody to work for now.

Next morning she went to chapel with Mrs. Huxam and, finding herself brave afterwards, actually followed Jeremy's suggestion and gave Judith a shock of unexpected pain.

"Mother," she said. "I've got great thoughts and you should hear them. We can't think anything we're not meant to think, and now my thoughts have taken a turn. You know how it was with me. After our trouble I didn't want to live; I'd have been glad to shut my eyes and sleep and never wake up. Then I got better and braver. And then I grew to miss the life of my home terribly, because, whatever the cause, to be wrenched out of the little holding of your days must hurt. And so I got worse again—body and mind. And now I've looked on and asked myself about it."

"Better you looked still farther on and put away all that joins you to the past. That I've told you more than once, Margery."

"You have; but I can't do it. You can't forget your whole married life and your motherhood and the father of your children. If you do, there's nothing left for a woman. And I've come to see this very clearly. I'm Jacob's wife."

"No longer in the Lord's sight."

"Let me speak. I'm Jacob's wife; and what I'm sure now is that Jacob is a very different man from what he was. God Almighty has changed Jacob, and the poison that did these dreadful things is poured out, and he's left, like the man from whom the devil was drawn by Jesus Christ. Mother, when first I even thought about Red House, I felt shame and durstn't tell you, for I feared the longing to see it again came from the devil. Now I don't feel shame, and I know the longing don't come from the devil. There's duty to be done there yet."

"Thank God you've told me this," answered Judith, "for we've got to do some fierce fighting, I fear. Not the devil? Why, I see his claws, Margery!

"'Tis his last and deadliest stroke, to make his temptation look like duty and come before you clothed like an angel of light. An old trick that's snapped many a soul. Never, never do you hide your thoughts from me, Margery, after this."

"But wait. Suppose, by forgiving in act as well as heart, I went back presently. Then I might save Jacob himself."

"Oh, the cunning of the Enemy—the craft—the sleepless cleverness! No, you can't save Jacob Bullstone; but you can lose yourself. There's always the chance of losing yourself while breath is in your body, and Lucifer knows it, and he'll often win at the last gasp on a man's death-bed. He's proud, remember, and his pride leads him to try the difficult things. Can't you see? How is it so few can see the net he weaves, while the lotion of the Gospel's at everybody's hand to wash their eyes clear if they would?

He's vain as a peacock and likes to do the difficult things and catch the souls in sight of Heaven's gates. I know; I read him; not many women have conned over his ways like I have. And now he's saying 'Jacob Bullstone is mine—a gift from his youth up—and there's no cleverness in keeping your own; but the woman he's cast down is not mine.' And your soul would be worth the winning. And what's cleverer than to make you think you can save your doomed husband's soul when, to try, would be to lose your own? You'd best to pray on your knees about this and call loudly on your Saviour. I'm a lot put about to hear of such dreadful thoughts. They've crept in through the chinks in the armour of salvation, Margery, and you must look to it this instant moment."

"There's a human side, mother. The man has been called to face death. He lies there in hospital and——"

"And where did he fling you to lie? Where was hospital for the ills you have suffered and the death you have died? There is a human side, and to return good for evil is our duty; but there's a higher duty than that. Don't argue. I know all about the human side; but humanity was never yet called upon to risk its immortality and hope of salvation. I'll hear no more touching this at all, Margery. I'm suffering for you a good bit. I've failed to make the truth clear seemingly."

"No, no, you haven't failed. I know how you view it."

"Set your trust where only trust can be set," said Mrs. Huxam, "and trust your God, like a little child, to show you, in His good time, how your future life's got to go. And first He wills for you to get up your health of mind and body. Your mind before everything. Your body's nought; but your mind's sick—far, far sicker than I thought—and we must see to it. There's fighting to be done and we'll fight. I thought all that was over; but the devil smells a sick soul, like a cat smells fish, and I might have known there was danger lurking."

They returned home, to find that somebody had called

upon Margery's mother. Old William Marydrew awaited them in his Sunday black.

Margery he welcomed kindly, though she responded in doubt; but Mrs. Huxam, who knew the ancient man for her son-in-law's friend, showed open suspicion and seemed little inclined to grant the speech he begged.

"I've no quarrel with you," she said, "and I very well remember your godly daughter, for Mercy Marydrew had the light; but——"

"The better the day the better the deed," ventured Billy. "Don't stand against me till you've heard me. I don't come from Mr. Bullstone. I'm here on my own—for a friendly tell—and I hope you'll respect my age and give ear to what I'd like to say."

Mr. Huxam, who had been talking to William until his wife's return, supported the proposition.

"Hear him, Judy," he said. "Nobody's ever heard nothing from William that he shouldn't hear, but on the contrary, much that was well worth hearing. Wisdom like his, when it's mellow and not turned sour, as wisdom will with some old folk, be all to the good. We'll go into the kitchen and see after dinner and leave you to it."

He departed with Margery, and Mrs. Huxam took off her black thread gloves and blew her nose.

"Speak then," she said, "and take the easy-chair. I'm not one to deny respect and attention to any religious-minded man; but I warn you that there are some things don't admit of dragging up. You understand."

William plunged at once into the great matter of his visit.

"Single-handed I come," he said, "and I wish I was cleverer and better skilled to bend speech to my purpose; but you must allow for that. In a word, there's a general feeling in a good few minds that Jacob Bullstone is indecent and blameworthy to want his wife to go back to him; while, against that, in a good few other, well-meaning minds—women as well as men—there's a feeling it might

be a very decent thing to happen, and wouldn't hasten the end of the world anyway. And I, for one, incline to think the same."

"The end of the world's not our business," said Judith, "but the souls of ourselves and our children and grandchildren are our business. You strike in on ground where I've just been treading, and I'm very sorry to hear you can say what you have said. Whether it's indecent and blameworthy for Jacob Bullstone to want his wife don't matter at all. What those doomed to eternal death want, or don't want, is nought. But we've got to think of the living, and we've got to save the souls that are still open to be saved."

"Certainly; and who, under God, has the right to damn woman, or child, or man, or mouse, my dear? I saw Bullstone in hospital yesterday, and seeing and hearing him, it came over me like a flame of fire to have a word with you, because well I know you are the turning point—the angel of life, or death I might say—to these two. Everything depends upon you seemingly—or so he reckons. You hold their future lives in your hand. That's a lot to say, but not too much. And I should much like to hear your point of view on this high subject. Bullstone, I must tell you, have suffered a very great deal, and his eyes are opened to his lunatic act. He was just as mad every bit as Sammy Winter, who set the bull on him to mangle him. Just as mad, my dear; but with a far worse sort of madness; and yet a madness that can be cured, which Sammy's can't in this world. And afore the God we both obey, I tell you that Jacob is cured. His sufferings have been all you could wish, and his broken thigh, and so on, was nothing in comparison. He's gone through tortures that make his broken bones no worse than a cut finger; and I want you to understand that he's long ways different from what he was, Mrs. Huxam, and an object for good Christian forgiveness all round. And now you tell me what you think about it."

Judith looked, almost with pity, at the ancient prattler. It seemed to her that such people as Mr. Marydrew could hardly have more souls to save, or lose, than a bird on a bough. They were apparently innocent and went through the world, like unconscious creatures, doing neither harm nor good. But Billy suddenly appeared in harmful guise. It was as though an amiable, domestic animal had showed its teeth, threatened attack and became a danger.

"You're touching subjects a thought too deep for your intellects, Mr. Marydrew, if you'll excuse me for saying so," she began.

"Don't say that. I venture to think——"

"You think, but I know. I know that no man or woman can interfere between Jacob Bullstone and his Maker, or undo what's done. For once even the doubtful sense of the world at large sees it. A child could see it. My daughter has come to the gate of salvation by a bitter road, like many do. She's faced great sufferings and escaped awful perils; but she's through the gate; its fast home behind her, and she ain't going to open it again to her death—be sure of that. He dares to want to see her, and you say he's changed. But, after you've done some things, it's too late to change. He's lost. Why? Because, like a lot of this generation, he's listened to false teachers and thought the Powers of Evil were growing weak. To hear some people, you'd think the devil was no more than a scarecrow set up to frighten the world into the paths of goodness."

"True," admitted Billy. "It was so with me. Looking back I can plainly see, as a lad, the fear of Old Nick had a lot more to do with my keeping straight than love of God. God was above my highest imaginings. I only knew He was wishful to get me into Heaven some day, if I gave Him half a chance. But the devil seemed much nearer and much more of a live person. Somehow you find that bad folk always are nearer and more alive than good ones—don't you?"

"Because we all know bad people and have every chance to see them misbehaving," said Mrs. Huxam, "but good people are rare, and always will be."

"I wouldn't say that. I'm so hopeful that I rather share the growing opinion against hell. I believe the next generation will knock the bottom out of hell, my dear, because they'll find something better. There's a lot of things far better than in my youth, and new love be better than ancient fear. Grant that and you can't say Jacob's down and out. He's a very penitent man, and he's turned to God most steadfast of late, and it would be a great triumph for the mercy of God, his Maker, if he came through, and a great sign of the Almighty's power in human hearts."

She regarded Billy with mild interest, but hardly concealed her contempt.

"And you in sight of your grave and your judgment, and so wrong in opinions," she said. "'A sign?' Yes. This generation seeks after a sign no doubt; and that's an impious thing to do at any time. And I dare say the day is not very far off when it will get the sign it deserves. D'you know what you're doing, you perilous old man? You're trying to hold back the mills of God—you, that know so little of the truth, that you can say the bottom's going to be knocked out of hell! I didn't ought to listen, I reckon, for from your own mouth you've told me you are with the fallen ones, and I never thought the father of Mercy Marydrew had missed salvation. But 'tis a very true thing that most of us are judged out of our mouths. No devil! Poor soul! Poor, lost soul! But, such is the will of God, that I see clearer and clearer how only them that have escaped Satan know him for what he is. The world lies in his keeping, and the people don't know no more what has caught them than the fish in a net. But I know. I see his ways and his awful art. I see him as he is—black—black—and you can smell the smeech of him when some people are talking. And not the swearers and

few ones only, but many, as think, like you, they are doing God's work. That's the last and awfulest trick of him, William Marydrew—to make his work look like God's."

Billy was amused and distracted from the object of his visit.

"My!" he said. "Blessed if I thought there was anybody in Brent knew such a lot about Old Nick as you do, Mrs. Huxam. A proper witch doctor you be! But even the saved make mistakes. 'Tis on the cards you may be wrong, and I hope you are. You'm terrible high-minded, but them that want to be high-minded must be single-minded, and the clever ones often come to grief. You know a lot too much about the Black Man, and I'd like to hear who told you. But be that as it may, there's a very fine thing called mercy—come now."

"There is," said Mrs. Huxam, "or the bolt would fall a lot oftener than it does. Mercy belongs to God, else heaven would be empty when the Trump sounds; but there's also such a thing as justice, and justice is man's business. He can leave mercy where it belongs and not dare to think of such a thing when a sinner falls. For that's to know better than Him that made the sinner. Justice is what we understand, because our Maker willed that we should. Our first parents had their taste of justice, and justice is within our reach. To talk of showing mercy to the wicked as you do, is to say a vain thing and range yourself against justice. Only through justice can come hope for any of us, William Marydrew. Our business is to do justly and not pander with evil, or try to touch the thing with merciful hands."

"And that's what life have taught you," murmured Billy. "And you thrive and keep pretty well on it. I've always heard you was a wonder, my dear, but how wonderful I never did guess. Now tell me, is Adam Winter, who be of the Chosen Few, in the right to forgive the man that did him so much harm, or in the wrong?"

They talked for an hour, then, weary and conscious that

Mrs. Huxam was not made of material familiar to him, William rose and went his way.

"No offence given where none is taken, I hope. I'm sorry you can't see it might be a vitty thing for husband and wife to come together in fulness of time; because if you can't see it, it won't happen perhaps. But turn over the thought, like the good woman you are, and if the Lord should say that mercy ain't beyond human power, after all—well, listen."

"You needn't tell me to listen, Mr. Marydrew. I'm sorry for your blindness and I'm sorry for your deafness, but I see clear and I hear clear still."

"Good day then. No doubt it takes all sorts to make a world."

"Yes," answered she, "but only one sort to make a heaven."

He laughed genially.

"Then I hope they won't knock the bottom out of hell, after all, else where should us of the common staple go? Must spend eternity somewhere."

"Scratch a sinner and the devil always peeps out," thought Mrs. Huxam as William departed.

CHAPTER VII

AT JACOB'S BEDSIDE

A WEEK later William visited Jacob in hospital. He was nearing recovery, but now knew that he might be lame for the rest of his life. The sufferer felt indifferent; but he cherished minor grievances and grumbled to his friend.

"Only Auna ever comes to see me. Would you believe that? Not once has John Henry visited me, and only once, Avis—and her marriage, that I've agreed to, and the farm that I've given her and all!" he said.

"Young lovers be selfish toads," explained William; "think nothing of it. I believe Avis will prove a better daughter after marriage than before. She's the sort will get sweeter with ripeness. For John Henry there's no excuse. I'll talk to him some day and open his eyes. But the great truth is that their amazing grandmother be more to your children than their own parents. A mystery, Jacob; but the ways of blood are always a mystery. The dead will come to live in their havage¹ and pass on the good and bad qualities alike. 'Tis a pity Providence don't look to it that only the good be handed down; because then the breed of men and women would be a lot better by now than they are; but all qualities are part and parcel, and even goodness often takes narrowness and coldness of heart along with it."

"Margery's heart was never cold."

"But her mother's—her mother's, Jacob! I may tell you now that I carried out a little plot in that quarter and

¹ *Havage*—offspring.

went to see Mrs. Huxam on a Sabbath. I had in my mind that at my great age and with my well-known good character, I might influence her; because in a few other directions I've talked round high-minded people and showed 'em that, as things are, nought could be hopefuller than for you and your wife to come together again."

"You meant well as you always do, Billy."

"An Old Testament fashion of woman is your mother-in-law. The faith that would move mountains. It's a good thing that she hasn't got much power, for she'd use it in a very uncomfortable fashion if she had. A great, mournful wonder in the land. She's like a sloe-bush, Jacob: the older she grows, the sharper her thorns and the poorer her fruit. I came away with my tail between my legs, I assure you. I was dust in the wind afore her."

"She'll never change."

"Never. Wild horses wouldn't make her change. Hell comforts her, same as heaven comforts us, and there's no fear the fires would go out if she had the stoking."

"The littleness of her—the littleness of her!" cried Jacob. "Can't she see that all this talk is nothing to tortured flesh and blood? Her power lies in the weakness and ignorance of other people. Hear this, William: my wife would see me and listen to me, if her mother allowed it. And when I know that—to Auna she whispered it—in a weak moment—still Auna heard—and when I know that, what's hell or heaven to me? They must be nothing, anyway, to a man who has done what I've done—to a man who has brought such sorrow on the earth as I have. What is eternity to one who's wasted all his time? The things I might have done—the happiness I might have given—the good I might have wrought! Instead, I break the heart of the best, truest woman ever a man had for wife. What can alter that? Can eternity alter it? Can heaven make it better, or hell make it worse? Nothing can change it but what happens here—here—before it's too late. And Judith Huxam is going to confound all—just

that one, old woman, poisoned by religion, as much as I was poisoned by jealousy."

"A very great thought, Jacob," admitted Mr. Marydrew. "We be in the hand of principalities and powers, and mystery hides our way, look where we will. But we must trust. Everything is on the move, and the Lord can touch the hardest heart."

"Hearts are nothing, William. The head governs the world, and great, blind forces govern the head. Blind forces, driving on, driving over us, like the wheel over the mole by night; and despite our wits and our power of planning and looking ahead and counting the cost, we can't withstand them. They run over us all."

"We can't withstand 'em; but the God who made 'em can," answered William. "Be patient still and trust the turn of the lane. You be paying the wages of your sin, Jacob; you be paying 'em very steady and regular; and I hope that a time will come when you'll be held to have paid in full. We never know how much, or how little our Maker calls us to pay for our mistakes. You may have very near rubbed off the score by God's mercy; for He's well known for a very generous creditor and never axes any man to pay beyond his powers."

He chattered on and, from time to time, patted Jacob's big hand, that lay on the counterpane of his bed.

The sick man thanked him presently and then there came Peter, to see his father on business. He asked after Jacob's health and expressed satisfaction to know that he was making progress. Having received necessary instructions, he went his way and William praised him.

"There's more humanity in Peter than there is in my eldest," admitted Peter's father.

He grew calmer before Billy left him and promised to keep his soul in patience.

"First thing you've got to do is to get well and up on your legs again against the wedding," urged William.

"I hope much from it," answered Jacob. "I'm planning

to beg Barlow Huxam to see me on the subject. That's reasonable—eh?"

"Very reasonable indeed. He's one with a good deal of sense to him. In fact the man as have lived all his life with your mother-in-law must have qualities out of the common," declared William. "But he haven't neighboured with that amazing character all these years for nothing. How much of his soul he calls his own, you may know better than me. 'Tis a case of Aaron's rod swallowing the lesser, and he won't gainsay Mrs. Huxam in anything, I'm afraid."

When he was gone, one thought of a comforting character remained with the sick man. He had been much daunted with the tremendous moral significance of the opinion of the world and its crushing censure. It had weakened resolution and increased his self-condemnation. Now his friend was able to assert that public emotion grew quieter against him; that even, in some quarters, he had won an admission it might be reasonable for husband and wife to come together again. This fact soothed Bullstone, for like many, who do not court their fellow-creatures, he had been, none the less, sensitive of their opinions and jealous of their approval. Herein, therefore, appeared hope. He felt grateful to his old companion, who, among so many words that to Jacob meant no comfort, was yet able to drop this salutary consolation. He much desired to tell Auna, who had long been the recipient of all his confidences and made older than her years by them.

CHAPTER VIII

JEREMY EVASIVE

AFTER Margery knew her husband's desires, she was animated fitfully to make an effort and return. But she lacked strength to do any such thing single-handed. She had been losing vitality, yet so gradually, that none about her appeared conscious of the fact. Even Auna saw her too often to appreciate it. The girl came every week, but won no further opportunity to see her mother alone. She opposed a sulky obstinacy to her grandmother and Judith began to fear for her.

Then Margery saw her brother again and, with even less reticence than on a former occasion, appealed to him. She had kept her original contract and succeeded in winning her father. It was understood that Jeremy and Jane would take over the post-office and the draper's shop, when the Huxams went to their private house; and Jeremy, now accustomed to the idea, argued that his sister had really not influenced the decision and that she might not, therefore, fairly ask him to assist her present project. In fact he much desired to be off the bargain, and but for Jane, would have evaded it. She showed him, however, that this might not honourably be done and, with very ill grace, Margery's brother listened to her purpose.

"I must go back when he does," explained Jacob's wife. "He's made a good recovery, and can walk on crutches, and will soon be able to travel with a stick. And the next thing will be the wedding, I suppose; and I ought to be at my home for that. Because such a thing will break the ice and help all round—at least so I feel and hope. I

must go back, Jeremy. I'm called stronger and stronger to it, and mother's awful ideas don't trouble me no more. I've gone much farther than to forgive Jacob now. He's been very near death and I ask myself what I'd have felt. But all that's my business. What I beg from you, Jeremy, is just practical help—to meet me by night with your trap, unbeknownst to any living thing but ourselves, and drive me back."

"I don't like it—I hate it," he answered. "It's not a religious action and I'm very doubtful indeed if it's a wise one even from a worldly point of view. The excitement will certainly be terrible bad for you, because you're in no state at all to stand it."

"It may be kill or cure; but I'd far rather face it than go on like this—seeing my bones come through my skin and my hair fall me. It'll soon be now or never; but I do think, if I get back quietly and quickly, I'll build up again and be some good to my family. I'm only sorry for mother."

Jeremy exploited the ethical objections.

"You see, Margery, it's quite as difficult for me as for you. As a matter of fact you're putting a great charge on my conscience, because I've got to go contrary to mother and behind her back—a thing I've never yet done—and feeling as I do that she is right——"

"You've promised," interrupted Jane. "You promised to lend Margery a hand if she helped you; and she did help you. And it's humbug to say you never hid anything behind your mother's back, my dear man. What about it when you married me?"

"I'm talking to Margery, not you," he replied, "and I was going to say that somebody else might help her in the details much better than I could. You see some think she's right, and such as them would do this with a much better appetite than I shall. How if I was to drop a hint and get another man to do it, Margery? It would be just the same to you and a good bit pleasanter for me."

"There's nobody but you," she answered, "and it's properly unkind if you're going back on your promise."

"He isn't," declared Jane with diplomacy. "He's a lot too fearless and a lot too good a brother for that."

"I wouldn't say I promised; but of course if you feel I did——" continued Jeremy. "However I've got rather a bright idea, and since you're firm about this, and nobody will thank God better than your husband if you do go back, then why not let him do it? That would be a natural seemly arrangement since you both think alike. I'm perfectly willing to go to him and tell him."

"No," said Margery. "That would upset everything I've planned. My return must be a surprise for a thousand reasons. I want to go back as I came out. In plain words, I've got to escape mother to go at all. Set like steel as she is against any truck with Jacob, I have no choice but to deceive her. I'm too weak to carry it off with a high hand, and she'd stop me if she guessed I was thinking of it. Only I can't, of course, walk to Red House, and so I must be drove; and you must drive me."

"If you're a man, you will, Jeremy," added Jane. "You promised."

"I bargain, then, that my part never comes out," said Jeremy, much perturbed. "I consider this is something of a trap I'm in, and I don't think much the better of you for it, Margery. And I believe you're courting a pack of trouble, not to speak of Everlasting punishment if you go back to such a man. But since you won't let me out, I'll do as you wish on the one understanding, that my name's never whispered."

Neither Margery nor Jane, however, felt any sorrow for Jeremy.

"Thank you, then," said his sister. "It's only a question of waiting now till my husband's well enough to go home. Then you can fix up a night, and I'll husband my

strength and come and meet you at Lydia Bridge, or somewhere out of the way. We might do better to go round under Brent Tor."

"We must leave the details for the present," said Jeremy, "and it will be needful to wait till the nights are longer and darker."

Jane changed the subject.

"What about Avis and Bob?" she asked. "Jacob counts on their wedding taking place from Red House—so Mr. Marydrew told me."

"It's going to be a difficult subject," answered Margery; "everything must be difficult till we begin again; and mother won't do anything to make it less difficult."

"Jacob naturally expects his daughter to be married from her home—and why not?" asked Jane.

"Because it isn't her home," explained Jeremy. "You can't talk of Red House being a home no longer, and mother's right there. Red House ceased to be a home when Margery left it."

"But if I was back that would be altered," declared Margery. "It all points to my going back. And mother will live to see it was right, if only for our children's sakes."

Jeremy, however, would not allow this.

"Don't fox yourself to think so. Your children haven't any use for their father and never will have. He's done for himself with them—all but Auna—and when she's old enough to see the sense of it, no doubt she will."

"Jeremy's right," said Jane. "You mustn't think that, Margery. The boys and Avis always did care a lot more for you than their father. They never hit it, and you knew it, if Jacob did not."

"He knew it very well; but it didn't alter his feeling for them. He'll do the right thing by all of them, however they treat him," argued the other.

"You may think so, but John Henry's a great fool for turning his father down as he does all the same," declared

her brother. "The man's not made of patience, and as to justice, the less we say about justice the better, when we think of you and look at you now."

"I've told John Henry to see his father; I've told him half a dozen times on the quiet," said Margery. "For his own sake he should."

Elsewhere, by a coincidence, this very thing that they desired was happening, for John Henry had met Jacob's ancient friend and been firmly directed to pay his injured parent a visit. He obeyed, being the more inclined to do so for private ends; and while Bullstone first felt satisfaction at the visit, his pleasure presently waned, since it became apparent that not concern for his father alone had brought John Henry.

He hoped that Jacob was better; but this was not what interested him.

"'Tis a very good thing you weren't killed," he said, "and I expect you'll have the law of that lunatic and win this time. He didn't ought to be at large, for he's cunning and wicked. He may do something like this again and bring it off next time."

"I've gone through all that with Adam Winter, his brother. You needn't trouble on that score. It's all part and parcel of other things, and there's no fear that Samuel would assault anybody but me. I've told his brother that I won't take any step in the matter, or have him put away. He's not the only one who has been revenged against me, John Henry. At any rate he did it openly."

"It's all very wretched and I'm sick of the subject, and I wish it could be dropped," said his son; "and it's a thousand pities that you can't go farther off from Brent, or else mother can't be took away out of it. There's a talk of her going to Uncle Lawrence, and it would be a blessing if she did, for she's growing to a thread-paper and getting as weak as a rabbit. Of course you can't go, I suppose; but she might, and they ought to take her."

"Your mother's thin? So Auna says. It's a great grief to me."

"No business of mine anyway. But you must look after yourself nowadays, for there's nobody else to trouble about you, and I think I've a right to ask a few things, father."

"Certainly. Ask what you please, John Henry."

"Very well then. And first I'm very glad you've made such a good recovery, and I'd have come sooner but for the mountains of work. I hope you won't take it amiss, or think I'm pushing, or anything like that; but, with you, none of us ever know exactly where we're standing, because you do such unexpected things. I've always been a good son, I believe—quite so good a son as Avis is daughter, anyhow; and you've given her Owley, so I feel it's only fair, me being your eldest son, if I ask for Bullstone."

"Owley's my wedding gift to Avis. She's going to be married and going to live at Owley as you know; therefore it was a very good time to let her have it. You're not of age."

"I soon shall be; and the eldest ought to have Bullstone."

"Why in such a hurry? I haven't gone yet. Plenty of time."

"You let Avis have Owley."

"Fight against your mean greed," answered his father. "Even your grandmother won't approve lust for this world's goods. Go on with your work, learn your business and trust me for the future. Remember that I've got to think of others besides you. I've taken over Huntingdon for myself, because a time will come some day, when I'm old, that I may decree to live there—for the air and peace. And then, no doubt, you'll have Bullstone, and Peter will own the business at Red House. But there's Auna too. And I'm not past work yet."

"If you could give me a written, signed promise for Bullstone, I'd know where I stood."

"Give—give—give! And are you never to give? Are

my children to receive always and return nothing—no duty, no love, no respect even? Have you ever thought what you owe to those who brought you into the world?”

“I owe no man anything,” answered John Henry without emotion. “And I never will. It’s always the fashion, seemingly, for parents to make a fuss about what their children ought to do, and expect them to fall down and worship them. Why should I—just because you married and had a good time with mother? And, seeing what life is, I don’t know that anybody need feel under any very great gratitude for being alive. It was all in the day’s work that I was born; you didn’t choose me, and a child don’t owe a parent any thanks whatever for coming into the world. And so far as the rest is concerned, you’ve done your duty by me, and I’ve done my duty faithfully by you, and everybody. I’ve never given any trouble—never got into a scrape—always been straight and hard-working. And I deserve Bullstone and ought to have it.”

“What does your mother say?”

“She’s understood that the eldest son had it. But I can’t talk of her to you, of course.”

“Why not?”

“I’m mother’s side, and God knows I wouldn’t do nothing against her,” he answered. “But this has nothing to do with her.”

“How so, if all mine is hers?”

“She wouldn’t take anything of yours, father, and never will. You talk as if nought had happened. You seem to forget. But you can’t expect none of us to forget, while we see her every week. It’s been a fearful thing—cruel for your children and everybody. It will never be forgot by mortal man I should think, and you can’t expect any of us to be exactly the same again. We’re honest and we’ve got our feelings and we’ve been through a lot. I’m sure you owe us something. And if you’re not going to let me have Bullstone, you ought not to let Peter have the business. I’m your eldest son and——”

"Learn what your mother thinks and come to me again," directed his father. "All I have is hers, and it was always her wish, when first Avis got engaged, that she should take Owley for her portion. If she'd like for you to have Bullstone while I live, it can be. After your mother's self, there's only Auna to think about."

John Henry cheered up and promised to do as he was directed.

"I'm properly certain mother would say I ought to have it," he declared.

"I expect she would, and her word's my law. You'll be of age in less than a year, so things may happen as you would wish. But I don't transfer till the present lease has run out. It wouldn't do for you to own the farm on which you're being taught your business."

"I know my business. I know full as much as Bob Elvin, if not more. I've got larger ideas than him."

"I dare say you have; and now you'd best be gone. And you can see me again when you've heard your mother."

John Henry departed and Jacob considered him. In the past he had much resented similar applications on smaller subjects: the young man never lost anything for the sake of asking; but now this large request left him unmoved. He meant to leave Bullstone to his son, and had no real objection to handing it over in his own lifetime. For the moment this incident offered hopes of a message from his wife. There might chance some thread in John Henry's demands to serve for the business of drawing Margery and himself together again. He was ever on the look-out for such threads.

CHAPTER IX

JACOB COMES HOME

THE mother of Margery believed, with Augustin, that persecution is the only solicitude the virtuous have any right to show a sinner. She held that where the least doubt of salvation might still be said to lie, it was better to torment than ignore, since this form of attention will sometimes torture the wrong-doer into grief for his wickedness, and so open the door to repentance and salvation. But she was not often in such doubt and generally separated the goats from the potential sheep without difficulty. The doomed she did not ever persecute, since any attention paid to those patently condemned was not only useless to them, but implied danger to the agent.

Of such, without the pale, was Jacob Bullstone, and now a situation had been reached where one thing must certainly have happened, save for the attitude of Judith Huxam towards him. Even despite her it might yet occur and the issue still stood in hope; but success implied that Margery would first actively oppose her mother, and her power to do so lessened fast.

The double accident of Jacob's broken thigh and his wife's indisposition delayed a possible union, and now the next step to any such event depended upon Margery. By letting her husband know that she desired to return, she might have shifted the responsibility on to his shoulders, and so ensured the achievement; but she was still anxious that he should not know, since she feared the violent steps that he might take to bring them together. Moreover she desired to be able to say afterwards to her parents that

she went of her own free will back to Red House, and that her husband had no hand in the action.

Thus precious days passed, and while Jacob gradually regained his strength, thought upon his daughter's wedding and hoped the event might be the beginning of a slow and patient re-winning of his wife, she was in reality won. Long years seemed already to drag between Margery and her home; while in her failing health, the life with her parents grew more and more distasteful and afflicting. She was conscious of the change in her physical circumstances—more conscious of it than her father, or mother; but she still believed that a return to Red House would restore her strength. A situation, simple in itself, was thus complicated. The man and wife wanted to come together—because each, in a solitary heart, felt that only so was life longer to be desired at all. An instinct of self-preservation called upon Margery to return and she felt that, otherwise, her fading life forces might not be much longer preserved. It was not desire for Jacob himself, but hunger for the healthy environment of home, that fortified her to get back to it. She had forgiven her cruel ignominies and now regarded them as she regarded her anæmia—as a sickness for which evil fortune had to be blamed. Jacob similarly had suffered from a dreadful sickness, and now he was cured. Thus nothing but religion stood between them to Margery's mind. She could pity Jacob in some moods, and see nothing wrong in her desire to return to him; while, in others, she still doubted, so far as he was concerned, but did not doubt for herself. Then the conviction increased that she must go back to Red House if she were ever to recover, and when she heard, through Auna and her own brother, that Jacob actually desired her to return, the last doubt vanished.

Bullstone's attitude resembled hers in intense desire; but he was ignorant of her dangerous health and postulated a gradual ordeal—an ordeal mercifully to end in her complete forgiveness and her subsequent return. Peace

might yet await them; but he was now broken into a patience he had not known, a patience willing to leave the future in his wife's hands. But there stood between them and any such consummation the figure of Margery's mother, assured that her daughter's husband was lost; that he was a man who could represent nothing but danger to the community of the faithful—a man condemned to the consequences of his unequalled sin—one who, since wickedness is both contagious and infectious, must be avoided absolutely. To approach such a man or seek communion with him was to challenge a pestilence; and when, therefore, Judith had heard her child, in a mood of melting, say that a wife's place was beside her sick husband, she took alarm and girded herself to repel the danger.

Indeed, Margery became her chief care; she neglected lesser obligations and she devoted much time to planning her child's welfare. Upon the news of Bullstone's accident, she had hoped he would not recover and, for a time, suspected that Providence had chosen this way to put Margery out of danger. But now Jacob was well again and about to return home; Avis clamoured for her delayed nuptials, and Margery held that she might, on such an occasion, be present, both in church, and afterwards, at Red House, if only for a little while.

Her mother firmly withstood the suggestion, and by her strenuous opposition convinced Jacob's wife of one thing: that only through the road of secret flight would she ever return to her husband's home. She knew now that Judith held it a choice between heaven and hell; she realised that if she returned to Jacob, her parents would regard her as eternally lost. The thought had shaken her at first, but she found, on examining it, that her attitude to religion was modified before reality. None had influenced her to this, for those whom she met were of her mother's opinion, and opportunity did not offer to learn the views of other people; but life and its present crying needs began to change her outlook. She contrasted the things she had been called to

suffer and the unspeakable torments shed upon her husband out of his own weakness, with the established convention of a loving, sleepless and watchful God, who desires mercy better than sacrifice, and is all powerful to establish that happiness on earth the craving for which He implants in His creatures.

She was no longer concerned for her soul, while her personal griefs served to show her mother's convictions in a new light. Thus, as her hold on existence grew more frail, she recoiled with increased revulsion from the dogmas of the Chosen Few. Mrs. Huxam had defeated her own object, as religious mothers are apt to do, and by drowning the wounded Margery in the billows of a melancholy and merciless faith, was indirectly responsible for creating a new vision, wherein failing nature still offered Margery some measure of promise. The very escape in spirit comforted her and she was more cheerful for a time; but she did not get stronger, save mentally, and her license of mind alarmed Mrs. Huxam, who read these symptoms in her own light. She felt that her daughter's unrest and doubt were the visible sign of an inward temptation, wholly to be expected at this crucial juncture in her affairs; and while obeying the doctor in matters of food and medicine, Judith believed that the vital encounter must be fought on other ground.

She was not as yet frightened for her child's life, but only concerned for her soul. She determined, once for all, that Margery should not go to the wedding of Avis. She now tried to wrest this matter away from Jacob, and even considered whether the ceremony might be arranged and hastened, while he was in hospital; but Barlow Huxam would not support her in this. He pointed out that to take such a step, which was possible enough, seeing that Avis and young Elvin were amenable to Judith, would be unwise and likely to create a measure of sympathy with Bullstone. For the postmaster had as yet by no means bated in his bitterness; he did not desire any weakening of

public sentiment against his son-in-law. That such a weakening existed already caused him some astonishment; but his attitude promised presently to respond to a stimulus that would not have touched Judith, for a measure of humanity, from which Mrs. Huxam's sterner outlook escaped, leavened Barlow's opinions.

Thus at the crucial moment it stood, and then a first step was taken. On a day in November, Jacob Bullstone came home, and Avis and Auna and Peter met his carriage at the outer gates of Red House.

All, for different reasons, were glad that he should be back again, and Auna chronicled each little incident of his return, hoping that opportunity would occur to tell her mother about it. She hid her young heart, which throbbed painfully to see her father so lame. But he told them that was a smaller matter, which would mend yet, and, at worst, not prevent him from presently riding again.

Peter did not rest until his father had been to the kennels, where Jacob was glad to be. He gave his son praise, admired two new litters of puppies and spoke with George Middleweek. George had matter for entertainment, or so it seemed to himself.

"Old Barton Gill was poking about here yesterday week," he said. "He told me he expected to find everything wrong and that he wasn't disappointed. He thought the puppies were a terrible poor lot and better in the river than out of it; and he said the kennels didn't look so smart, by a very long way, as in his time. He took a very grave view of everything, and at last he reached a point when I said that, old though he was, I should feel called to break his neck if ever I caught him here again."

"He's a ghost from the past, George," answered the master.

"Yes; and there's a few things less useful to busy men than ghosts from the past—especially weak and silly souls like Gill," answered Mr. Middleweek. "He's a ghost easily laid, however, and I don't reckon he'll be back along in a

hurry. 'Tis amazing how silly the wisdom of most old men looks, even in the light of middle-aged knowledge."

"The times move so fast," explained Jacob, "and the wisdom of the fathers is the foolishness of the children. In fact there's only one high fashion of wisdom, if you come to be an old man, George; and that is to keep your mouth shut all the time."

"There's some old fools you can forgive," declared the kennel-man, "but not old fools that bleat the past. Who has got time or patience for them?"

Then, as the evening shut down, Jacob came into tea and found that Auna and Avis had arranged a feast for him.

Now it was the turn of Avis and she led the conversation to her marriage.

"I do hope you'll see your way to it pretty soon, father," she said, and he promised her that the wedding was going to be his first care.

"Pray God your mother will be well enough to come," he hoped boldly; and Auna echoed his wish, but Avis doubted.

"I'm sure she wouldn't like Bob and me to wait any more, even though she's not very well. And I don't much think she would come, even if she could," explained Jacob's daughter. "Of course there's no getting away from the past, and granny would be a good bit put about if mother was to want to come to Red House after."

"Grandfather's rather wishful for mother to be at the church, however," said Auna, "for he told me so."

"And I'm sure Avis would wish that, too, and Bob also," declared her father. He had rather dreaded home-coming, but the ordeal proved pleasanter than he expected. Two men called together during the evening and Billy Marydrew, with Adam Winter, dropped in, that they might congratulate Jacob on his recovery.

Avis and Peter went about their own affairs, but Auna sat beside her father until he bade her leave them.

"I made this here man come in with me," explained William. "He weren't coming, but I said he'd be welcome for two reasons—firstly to wish you a friendly wish, which was in him to do, and secondly to see me home, because the night be blowing up for foul and I'm so light as a leaf nowadays; and if the wind thrust me in the river, there I should certainly bide."

They shook hands and Winter spoke.

"You know how much I've felt about this. It was a very terrible thing to fall out and——"

"Don't go back to it. Don't let it trouble you any more. How is the man? Does he understand that it was a bad thing to do? Does he understand that he and I have both been out of our minds and done bad things? Or he may argue, perhaps, that he was right to take the law into his own hands. Anyway what he did to me was a great deal less than what I did to you. I know—I know, Adam. It's one of the few blessings left that time can let me talk in this stark fashion to you. Where there's such forgiveness as yours to me, there's a great foundation for friendship. Humble enough on my side. But it would be well to know if Samuel has took your line in that matter and harbours no malice, or if I must be on my guard."

"He's long since forgotten all about it. He remembers no more than my bull remembers. He'll wonder to see you lame and treat you respectful, same as he did before."

"That's good then. There's compensations for a weak mind if it carries a weak memory, Adam. And yet, without memory, we can't mourn our sins and better our behaviour."

"That's why the beasts that perish don't get any forwarder, Jacob," explained William. "Memory be left out of them, save in small particulars. And so they just live, and their sorrow is a passing matter and their happiness not much more than a sense of comfort. And Sammy's terrible lucky in one thing, like all other lunies, that, though he pays the price of his wits in this world, he's a dead

certainty for salvation in the next. You may be born without a mind, you see, but if you're a human, you can't be born without a soul; and though this world's blank for Samuel, in any high sense, his number's up for the Kingdom of Heaven, since he's so sinless as a jackdaw, for all his mischief."

"A deep subject," admitted Adam, "and I don't know as ever I looked at it like that, Billy; but comforting for certain to them that care for the soft, unfinished ones."

"Oh, yes," promised Mr. Marydrew cheerfully, "our maniacs will all be there to welcome us; and in the light that pours out of the Throne, my dears, 'tis very likely indeed we shall find that the softies were often a damn sight saner than some of us, who prided ourselves on our wits."

"That's true for certain," said Jacob. "I can confess before such as you, though to some sort of men I never shall. But I can tell you that I've been mad and am sane again—sane enough, at any rate, never to trust my sanity any more. I was a very proud man, William, but pride has left me. I shall never be proud again, nor proud of anything that belongs to me."

"You never were that," answered Winter. "In fact, where you had the right to be proud, you were not, Bullstone."

They talked together, and Auna, who had been sent away soon after their arrival, now returned and poured drink for them. Jacob felt no objection to saying things before her that he would not have said before his other children.

"It is a good thing in my life to know that you can sit in this room as a friend," he said to Adam Winter. "There's a sort of sorrow that is not all pain; and though I shall never look upon you without sorrow, I shall always welcome the sight of you."

"I understand. And may the welcome never grow less and the sorrow dwindle," answered the other. "We've gone through a deep place; and I've lived to gather from you that you were possessed, as many good men have had

the ill luck to be; and please God others, that matter a very great deal more than I do, may live to understand the same."

Thus, upon his home-coming, there fell a fitful ray of peace into the outer regions of Bullstone's mind; and, content for a brief hour to live in the present and trust this Indian summer, he took heart for a little while.

He thanked them for their visit and declared, presently, that his physical wounds had been a good thing.

"To go short on your leg is a trifle, if it helps you to go longer in your heart, and take wider views and rise up into patience," he said. "I'm the wickedest of men, and yet I have got good friends who are wishful for my betterment. And I never shall forget it—never."

"You're not a wicked man, father. Tell him he's not a wicked man, Mr. Marydrew," urged Auna.

"Nobody's very wicked, my dear," answered Billy; "and nobody's any too good. We're all much of a muchness, and good and evil be like the berries on the trees—all stomachable to somebody. Good's bad and bad's good according to the point of view, and only through being bad, some folks reach to being good. To some nice people being good is as easy as falling off a log—same as it is to you, Auna, because you can't be any other; and to some equally nice sort of people, 'tis a lot more difficult. The point ain't so much whether you be good, as what you be good for. Some folk be so good as gold, and yet good for nought; and some are so wicked as the devil, and yet good for a lot. In fact 'tis a very wonderful world, my dear."

Auna laughed and presently the men rose to go home. Adam promised to send Samuel to see Jacob on the following day. Margery had not been named, but William alluded to her as he departed.

"There's always hope," he said. "I'll come along to-morrow and eat my dinner with you, and us'll have a tell. And don't you get too busy. You'll be a sick man yet, and your maiden here must look after you so well as she can."

Auna promised to do so, and when Avis and Peter had eaten their suppers and gone to bed, she waited on her father.

"I do all the things you do," she told him. "I lock up and put out the lamps and everything, because Avis is too busy with her wedding, and Peter don't remember little things."

She helped him to his own room presently and he found it prepared for him in every particular. Then she aided him to undress, and he bade her return, when she was ready to go to bed, and say good night. She came, in her grey flannel night-gown, and jumped in beside him for a little while.

He was very silent now and very tired. But he liked to listen to her. It seemed as though the years had rolled away and Margery, young again, was lying beside him. The very inflection of Auna's voice was hers.

And while she talked, the girl was thinking of her mother, too, for she knew what was in Jacob's mind.

"Go now," he said, for her presence became too poignant. "Good night, my dinky treasure, and God bless you."

She kissed him.

"And I hope—oh, how I hope mother will soon be here beside you, father dear."

He squeezed her hand.

"Dout the candle and go on hoping—go on hoping, my pretty bird."

Then she slipped away and the man lay awake for many hours before the circumstance of his home-coming. Its goodness was precious; but the loneliness and doubt tormented him.

CHAPTER X

FLIGHT

MARGERY fluctuated and on her feeblest days the desire to return home became most intense. For her own sake she longed to be back at Red House; for his sake she wanted to be with Jacob. Her emotions towards him eluded her; but when she knew definitely from Auna that his only dream on earth was to see her again beside him, pity woke a faint ghost of the old love. Red House itself drew her, for she felt that if the remainder of her life was to be spent as a sick woman, she could be a more useful one and a happier one in her home than with her parents. Though they assured her daily that their home was hers, and dwelt much on the delight of the villa residence, soon to receive them and Margery, she could win no pleasure from the thought and her weakened mind shrank more and more from the robust opinions of her mother and her father's forced cheerfulness. They were incapable of understanding all that she felt, and now indeed she lacked physical courage to attempt further explanation. In any case she would be opposed. Therefore, with plenty of leisure for thought, she matured her secret plans. They were foolish plans, for though the idea of telling Auna frankly that she longed to come home and leaving the rest to Jacob had more than once tempted her, this obvious course she feared, as being likely to create greater difficulties of ultimate reconciliation with her parents. So she gave neither Auna nor Avis any hint of the action proposed, but arranged with Jeremy, on the understanding that no word concerning his part in the plot

should be whispered. That assured, with ill grace he promised to meet her on a night in November, one fortnight before the day now fixed for the wedding.

Thus Margery planned her return home and hoped that the wedding of Avis and Robert Elvin would serve its turn to distract attention and smooth affairs afterwards. In sanguine moments she even trusted time to conciliate her parents. That her father would some day forgive her she knew, and that her mother must logically pardon in the obedience to her own faith, she hoped. For Margery fell back whole-heartedly upon the belief that she was prompted and driven home again at Heaven's command. She found much consolation and support in the belief that Providence willed her return. For her, as for many, faith was only fatality writ in a more comfortable word.

It had been arranged that at three o'clock on a certain morning, Jeremy and his trap should wait near Lydia Bridge, and that his sister should come by the pathway under forest trees, beside the river and join him there.

Margery conserved her strength for this supreme effort and, for two days before it came, lived in a trance. But she was alert enough to take more food than usual and preserve a cheerful attitude. Her only doubt centred in the extent of her physical strength, and now on the eve of her departure, as that winter day closed in under a cold and frosty sky, she wished, too late, that she had asked Jane to meet her close at hand, and pilot her through the night to Jeremy.

She knew that she could safely leave the house, for her parents always slept well and would not be awakened by any sound that she might make.

She sat with them that night until they bade her go to bed. Then her mother ministered to her, read a chapter from the Bible, while Margery drank her glass of hot milk, and so wished her good night and left her. The hour was ten o'clock and she knew that nearly five hours must pass before she would start. A little milk pudding was always

left beside her, to eat in the night if she awoke. This she determined to take at two o'clock, before she began to dress. Now the details, that seemed so simple at a distance, began to loom larger and more complicated. There was, after all, so much to do before she could get clear of the house, and the subsequent walk through the wood by the river began to seem a great thing. For she, who had once loved the night, felt nervous of it now. Again and again she wished that she had asked Jane to meet her near the post-office. She even considered the possibility of changing her plans and fixing another night, before which this detail might be arranged. But Jeremy would be at Lydia Bridge by three o'clock, and if she failed him, he could not be counted upon for a second attempt.

Her mind ran forward. She would leave Jeremy at the outer gate of Red House, while she,—about four o'clock, or earlier—would go through the wood and knock at the door. There was a bell, too; but if she could rouse Jacob without wakening any other, that must be best. His room looked over the porch. If she were strong enough, she would throw small stones and waken him.

She pictured him looking out and seeing her. He would certainly know who it was by star-light and hasten to let her in. The peat fire never went out at this season, and he would bring her to it and draw it up. He would not say much. He would be like a man fearful to wake from a dream; but she would speak. He must never know who had brought her home: he would not be jealous about that. Indeed he could not fail to guess. After all it would be very like Jeremy to confess in secret—for the sake of Jacob's applause and possible reward. Her husband would take her up to her room, then, and leave her to go to sleep, while he dressed and began the day. And presently her children would come to see her, while the familiar sounds would be in her ears—the song of the river, the bleating of the goats and the barking of the dogs. Puppies would tumble into her lap again—new puppies that she had never

seen; and old dogs she remembered would be there to remember her. She would be very still and rest all day; and then painful things must happen, for Avis, or Peter, must go swiftly in the morning to tell them at Brent and allay their alarm. She started out of this dream, for already she seemed lying in her own bed at home. But she was not there yet. Thinking wearied her. A clock struck midnight.

She was back again in thought at Red House presently. It seemed already hastening to meet her, instead of withdrawing far away under the stars and waiting for her to come to it. Her mind wandered over little homely things and indulged in little homely wonders. How was Jacob's linen? Auna mended for him now. And her own shards and husks—Auna had told her that nothing of them was touched. Jacob never allowed anybody to go near the great wardrobe that he had bought for her when they were married. But her clothes had curiously interested him. She doubted not that he looked at the empty rags sometimes and took care of them. He had always treasured the russet costume in which she was so nearly drowned before their marriage. She concentrated upon Jacob and wondered why he wanted her, and what he would think if he knew that she wanted him. Another hour passed and for a little while she slept, then woke frightened lest she had slept too long.

Elsewhere a scene of unusual vivacity was taking place which bore directly upon Margery's affairs; and while she reflected and dreamed, her parents entered upon a lively argument ere they slumbered. Barlow had taken his lozenge and was about to sleep when his wife addressed him and touched a matter already much in his mind.

"I'm a long way short of comfortable about Margery," she began, and he declared the same uneasiness. That he should echo her doubt interested Judith, but on questioning him she found that his fears were not concerned with

her daughter's soul. Her bodily state it was that agitated him.

"Dr. Briggs told me only to-day she was going back rather than forward. She wants a good shake-up in his opinion, and a very serious thing is this: that she's not anxious to get well seemingly. Doctor held that was a grave symptom. She's not set on building up her strength, and she doubts if she'll ever do it, unless something happens to throw her mind out of itself."

"Something will happen soon," said Mrs. Huxam. "There'll be the excitement of changing houses."

"It isn't that sort of excitement, Judy. We're too apt to forget that Margery was always a bit delicate. After the awful shock, and before she'd got over that, she was snatched away from her regular life and thrown into ours, which is quite different in every way. Quite right and necessary, but we can't realise all that meant, or all she had to go through, I expect. We only knew that she'd escaped from the evil to come; but there was another side to her home life which no doubt she's dreadfully missed and which we didn't know. In fact she's confessed it often. And now she's got anæmia, and that's dangerous in itself."

"I'm troubled about something a good bit more dangerous than anæmia," answered Judith. "The dust we're made of only holds together as long as our Maker wants to cage our souls on earth. Then He cracks it and lets the soul out; and that happens at the moment He wills and not a moment sooner. Margery is like a swallow in September—restless, restless. You can see it in her eyes—not resigned and not interested in the villa residence, but thinking far too much of self. The devil's at her, Barlow."

"It's nature—not the devil. And you must put the body first for the minute, because the state of the soul often depends upon it. In a word I'm not at all sure if Lawyer Dawes wasn't right. He told me flat out, that if he could make it happen, he'd get Margery and her husband friends again; and he said that was more likely to improve her

health, and save her life even than anything that can overtake her. He's seen a good bit of Jacob Bullstone and he assures me he's a changed man."

"And what did you say? Reproved the vain fool I should hope. 'Save her life!' Doesn't Dawes know that 'He who loses his life for My sake shall save it'? Did you tell him that? Did you remind him that the only life that matters to a Christian is the eternal life?"

"I did not," confessed Barlow, "because, in the case of Lawyer Dawes, that would have been vain conversation. And I may remind you the specialist that Dr. Briggs had down to see Margery from Plymouth said something to the same purpose. He's known for a very clever man indeed, with many good and amazing cures to his credit, and he understands his business be sure. Briggs didn't agree with him I grant, because he hates Bullstone for his crimes, and wouldn't have her go back; but Dr. Nettle-ship, from Plymouth, did firmly hold that if they could be brought together it might be the turning point for Margery and restore her health and peace. And, what's more, I wouldn't be so very much astonished if Margery herself was agreeable."

Mrs. Huxam sat up wide awake.

"You properly shock me," she answered, "and I'm very sorry that I've heard you utter these loose thoughts. For they show a weakness that I never guessed was so near home. And now you say she's that way inclined herself, and don't that show I'm right—that her spirit is in danger? It's too true that she's in moods sometimes, when she thinks of that man in a very improper manner. I've surprised her in them, and we know Satan finds plenty of evil thought for idle minds. But let it be understood once for all that they are evil and open the way to deadly danger; and never let me hear you say again that it might be well for her to go back to Red House; because if I do, I'll change my lifelong feeling to you, Barlow."

"Don't say nothing you'll repent," begged Barlow.

"You've taken this in far too fierce a spirit. We only want to consider all possible plans for making Margery well in body first."

"We have not to consider anything of the sort," answered Judith. "Her body matters not a brass button against her soul; and if, in her bodily weakness, the devil sees an opportunity, then 'tis for us to hinder him, not help him. You're very near as bad as old Marydrew and other people I've heard on the subject. Don't you see what becomes of your daughter's soul, if she goes back to that doomed sinner even in thought? You've astonished me a good bit by your earthly blindness to-night, for I thought you were long past any such weakness. Sometimes my heart sinks when I look at life and see, even among my nearest, such dangers opening under their feet. But you—I certainly did always count that you were safe."

Barlow in his turn was hurt.

"So did I," he said, "and with tolerable sound reason; and it's a source of great pain to me that you can doubt it. You mustn't imagine, Judy, that I'm taking any fatal attitude. I'm very well satisfied that Margery can look after her soul; surely you've taught her how to do that? And I'm also tolerably certain I can look after mine. You mustn't get into the way of thinking you're the only creature on God's earth who be out of danger. I'm talking of our daughter's body for the minute, not her soul, and if the Plymouth doctor says a certain thing—a man of great knowledge too—and you have reason to believe that Margery may have some ideas in the same direction, then I say it's well within reason, and religion also, to turn it over before you turn it down."

"And I say that you lie," answered Mrs. Huxam firmly. "As to reason, I don't know and don't want to know. I hate the word. I know where reason will bring most humans, despite their Saviour's blood poured in a river for them. And I will speak for religion and our child's eternity and only that; and I tell you that any such horror as

her going back to her old life would shut the door of Heaven against her for evermore. And that you know as well as I do; and I hope you'll call on God to forgive you for pretending to doubt it. And I hope God will forgive you, else you'll soon be in pretty sad trouble yourself."

Mr. Huxam did not immediately reply, but the adamant conviction with which Judith spoke impressed him. He did indeed suspect that from the standpoint of religion she might be right; but he excused himself.

"A father is a father," he said, "and if natural longing, to see my only daughter strong and happy again, led me to offend—well, you must make allowance for human weakness, Judy."

"A father is a father as you say, Barlow; and a Heavenly Father is a Heavenly Father; and if you're not prepared to say 'Thy will be done' at your time of life, then I can assure you that it's a very hopeless attitude. We want to make Margery's soul sure for God. We want to know that when we're safe through the Vale, our children—the souls we have been allowed to bring on earth—will follow us to our eternal home, or go in front, as in the case of our Thomas. The order of going is God's business, but the road is ours, and having the Light, what shall be said of the human parent that would let a child stray on the wrong road if he could prevent it? You're playing with everlasting fire for your only daughter—that's what you're doing to-night."

"Then we'll go to sleep," said Mr. Huxam. "I quite understand she's in Higher Hands, and I also grant the duty to the soul is higher than the duty to the body. We'll see her together to-morrow, and tackle the subject, and try to find the right road for Margery—where body and soul both will be looked after."

But his wife would not let him go to sleep. She was roused into a very vivid wakefulness and she poured a long and steady flood of dogma into Barlow's weary ears. His answers became fewer and she talked him into uncon-

sciousness at last; but she did not sleep herself; and thus it came about that while Margery was dressing and putting on all the warm clothes that she could wear, her mother, fifteen yards away in the rambling, old house, remained very wide awake, her senses strung to dismay and her soul in arms. She had forgotten Margery and was now in deep trouble concerning Barlow's salvation.

Mrs. Huxam left her bed presently and knelt down to pray. But she found it exceedingly cold and rose and wrapped a dressing-gown about her, before she knelt again. It was then, in the stillness of a moonlit and frosty night, the time being a little after half past two o'clock, that Judith heard the shutting of the outer side door below her. There could be no doubt. The private entrance was closed gently, and it must first have been opened. Barlow slept and the room was dark save for the square of light where a white blind hid the window. She drew on her shoes, put the nearest garment, a flannel petticoat, over her head and left the room. She wasted no time in seeking for Margery, but descended at once, reached the door, found it unlocked, opened it and went into the street. The cold struck her like a blow and she gasped unconsciously. Thirty yards away, a woman moved in the moonlight and Judith knew that it was her daughter. She followed instantly and ran to overtake her. Hearing footsteps, Margery turned and, in a moment, her mother was beside her.

"Thank God!" was all Mrs. Huxam said, while the younger nearly felt, then strove to hurry on.

"Go back, go back, mother!" she implored. "You're wise,—you understand. It must be so. God has brought me to see it. Nought happens but by the will of God."

"Turn—turn and don't take the Name, Margery. Quick—quick! You shall come back. Quick then, for your soul's sake, before the frost strikes you dead in the act of sin. The will of God—yes—His will—to send me to save you—to head you off from death. The will of the devil you'd set out to do—and I've come between by the mercy of our

sleepless Father. Come back to me—come back to righteousness, Margery; come back and praise your Maker Who sent a faithful mother to save you.”

She used physical force while she talked. Their breath rose in the air; the old woman’s high-pitched voice echoed in the silent street; Judith dragged at Margery, while she, numbly conscious of the great cold, found herself not strong enough to shake her mother off. Mrs. Huxam held on and prayed aloud, with a vigour that mastered the wife of Jacob, until Margery felt her will perishing and her limbs refusing to resist. One last effort was made.

“Think before you hale me back,” she said. “Oh, mother, think! It’s either going home, or dying—I know it.”

“‘Home!’ Where’s your home? Don’t you understand yet? Have you drunk poison unbeknownst to us? Brace your body to do your soul’s work, Margery! There’s only one home for the spirits of the just made perfect. Trust your mother, who’s wearied your Maker’s ear for you ever since you were born. Trust me, I say. Am I nothing? Don’t you want Heaven, if only for my sake? Well I know you do. Praise God for His blessings and set your foot firm on the only way. That’s right—that’s right. Lean on me and praise your Maker. Oh, child—you poor, strayed sheep—did you think to go through this icy night all that way to hell? But you’d have fallen frozen—frozen in your sin—and then the loving Lord’s self couldn’t have saved you. But you’re safe now—safe, safe, Margery. The angels are singing over the sinner that was saved. We should hear ’em if our ears weren’t stopped with earth. That’s my brave child, with her hand in God’s and the powers of darkness routed. Off they go! You can almost see ’em—and the Children of Light guide you home.”

She half supported, half dragged Margery back; then she helped her to her room still pouring out a flood of speech. Mrs. Huxam had grown a little hysterical herself. Her daughter fell quite silent, and submitted, like a

child, to be undressed. But suddenly a moment of futile passion loosed her lips and she turned on her mother.

"You've brought me back to my death," she said. "Understand that, grasp hold of it. Your work to shorten my poor days and crush out my last hope. I shall never rise again off this bed—never, never!"

As she spoke, Mr. Huxam, who had been awakened, appeared at the doorway in a red dressing-gown and white wool night-cap.

"Praise God, father, praise God—lift your voice to the sleepless Everlasting!" cried Judith. "The Powers of Darkness are shattered and our girl's safe—safe!"

"Never did I doubt it," answered the man, and then he busied himself and begged his wife to come to bed.

But Judith would not leave Margery.

"I sleep with her—with my arms round her—with her head on the breast that gave her life and the heart that has beat for her since she was born. Be off to your chamber, Barlow, and sleep no more, but praise God. All's well—all's well now!"

Huxam, ignorant of what had happened, went his way, and Judith joined her daughter; while under the sinking moon, where winter trees spread their boughs above Lydia Bridge and the great arc of the waterfall flashed with a thousand sparks of white fire, Jeremy Huxam tramped the frosty road, stamped his feet, looked to the covering of his horse, flung his rug over it, and growled words seldom heard from one of the Chosen Few. For an hour he waited and several times paced the footpath by the river beneath, to meet his sister. But she did not come and, heartily glad of it, the man at last set out for home. Under the darkness before dawn, he trotted off, his horse's hoofs ringing noisily upon the frozen lanes.

CHAPTER XI

AFTER THE WEDDING

NONE but Jeremy and his wife ever heard particulars concerning that night, and it was only through his sister's confession to Jane that her husband learned why she did not come. Mrs. Huxam never guessed who had been waiting for Margery; indeed she did not know that anybody had waited, and felt little doubt that she had saved her child's body as well as soul. For her own part she came through the experience unhurt; but Margery suffered. Judith's excitement of mind had apparently served as armour against the inclement night and she was none the worse, while her daughter's debility and depression offered an easier prey to the cold.

Margery had been chilled and, for two days, the doctor feared. Then the immediate danger diminished, though the inherent source of mischief increased. From that night indeed it gained upon Margery and solved for her the problem of attending the wedding. She left her bed again, but could not leave the house.

Then Barlow Huxam asserted himself and insisted that the date of the wedding should be altered if Margery wished it; but she did not wish it. She knew that her chances of taking any part in the day were over. It was understood that Avis and Robert would spend five minutes with her, on their way to the station after they were married, and the wedding meal at Red House had been taken.

To this entertainment more were bidden than cared to come; but the Elvins and Robert's friends sufficed to brighten the feast that Jacob had planned. For him the

knowledge that Margery was too unwell to attend the service robbed the day of its sole salt; but he went through with the business and carried himself cheerfully.

There came Robert's mother and various relations, William Marydrew and others, including John Henry from Bullstone; but while the Huxams attended the service, they did not, of course, proceed to the bridal breakfast, nor were they troubled to decline, for Jacob knew it was impossible to invite them. He ventured to ask the Winters, however, and Adam was minded to go, but his aunt refused and prevented him from doing so.

"There's some things that are seemly and some that are not, and women are generally more understanding to know one from t'other than men," she said. "Your judgment tells you that you and poor Margery can't well meet no more under one roof, unless it's the Lord's roof o' Sundays; but with regard to this wretched man, just because that thing happened about Samuel, you have lost sight of the truth of him and seem to reckon there's no indecency in having truck with him. It may be Christian, but it ain't manners. I've never yet felt as my Christianity comes between me and my dignity, and I'm sorry you do."

"I'll not go, then," answered her nephew. "It can make no difference to him."

Many, indeed, attended the service who had no intention of joining the subsequent gathering. Jacob gave Avis away, and Auna was her bridesmaid; while for Robert, his elder brother, home from sea for a while, acted as best man.

The Huxams sat in church together, and Auna heard from Jane, before the wedded pair set out for Red House, that Margery was not so well that day. Auna kept her bad news until all was over at home and Avis and Robert had driven off together. Then she sought Jacob who sat alone, thankful to be alone, and told him that her mother was worse. But she came to the sad matter slowly, dwelt first on all that had happened, and declared that everything had fallen out very triumphantly.

"Dear old Mr. Marydrew sat by me at the feast," said Auna, "and Mr. Middleweek sat on the other side of me, and they were both very cheerful indeed—even George, though George is no believer in marriage."

"Isn't he, Auna?"

"Oh, no. He and Billy talked about it, and Billy says there's more happy marriages than not; and George said the happy ones be like a cornerake in the hayfield—oftener heard of than seen. And he said that marriage was like living in a shop all the time—buying, or selling—haggling and trying to get a cheap bargain on one side and holding out for the price on the other. But I'm sure George don't mean all the acid things he says about people marrying. And Mr. Marydrew talked very hopefully of the next world, and says he'll be a farmer up there and begin all over again. But he much hopes the Happy Land won't want such a lot of muck spread on it as Dartmoor does."

Jacob smiled, while she chattered; then she came to the bad news gently.

"I hope that mother will be strong enough to have a little tell with Avis and Bob before they start," she said; "but I'm terrible sorry to say dear mother ain't very peart this morning. Aunt Jane told me about it after Avis was married. I talked to her and Uncle Jeremy in the churchyard, and they both said it was a very beautiful wedding in their opinion, and Avis never looked so fine. But mother's gone weak. There ain't no nature in her."

He sighed.

"You'd best to go in first thing to-morrow. And we'll send her some goats' milk again. It did her good last summer. I made her drink some red wine, once, when she got too thin years ago. Burgundy it is called. I'll see the doctor about her. He doesn't like me; but he won't fear to name wine for her if he thinks it would be a right thing."

"Grandmother wouldn't suffer mother to drink wine, father."

"As medicine she would."

"So she would then," agreed Auna. "Medicine can't be wicked. And Jesus Christ turned water into wine for happy people at a wedding, so why shouldn't unhappy people be allowed a drop? I asked grandmother that once, and she looked at me unkindly. She doesn't like me very much."

"Because you haven't thrown me over, Auna."

"Throw you over!" exclaimed the girl. "What would there be left if I hadn't got you? There's nobody else in the world, till mother comes home again; and sometimes I think she never will, father."

"But sometimes you think that she's going to? You hope still, don't you?"

She saw how eager he was and regretted her speech.

"Yes, I do sometimes. I believe, if we could take her a pair of wings and tell her to fly, she would fly. And she'd fly straight to Red House I expect. She don't like the post-office, and she don't even like grandfather's new house overmuch I'm afraid."

"I'd be the wings to help her fly, Auna, if I could. She should fly quick enough if I thought she wanted to fly—aye, though I had to break down her father's walls to let her out."

Auna was struck dumb by the vision.

"I wish I could see her alone, but 'tis harder and harder to do now she mostly keeps her room. A girl ought to be able to see her mother alone at my age; but grandmother don't make me welcome now, and she hustles me off for one thing and another."

"She thinks evil—that's why. She thinks you are on my side against her, Auna."

"If she's against you, then I'm against her. I've stopped loving her this good while now, because she won't let me talk about you to mother. And I can see in mother's eyes that she's wishful to hear. And it's cruel I can't tell her about things."

Jacob considered and weighed the gravity of the situa-

tion. There was still no link between himself and his wife but such as Auna could furnish.

And as Bullstone reflected, Avis and her husband came before Margery at the post-office.

She was in bed to-day, but she sat up while the pair stood beside her. They were going to Exeter for a week of honeymoon, and Avis promised to see the cathedral and listen to an anthem.

"There's no Chosen Few in Exeter, so far as grandmother knows," said Robert's bride; "but she thinks there will be no harm if we worship in the cathedral o' Sunday. And we're going to the Museum also."

"Now tell me about the wedding. Did Bob speak out brave and clear, Avis?"

"Yes he did then—so loud that one or two in the church tittered—so Auna told us after. And I spoke out loud too. And grandfather and father signed the book in the vestry; and pretty near everybody waited to see me and Robert march out. And there was a lot of rice flung at me in the churchyard by old Billy Marydrew, but grandmother said he didn't ought."

"I do hope you'll soon be better," said Robert. "Mother's very wishful for you to come up to Owley in the spring time. She's dearly like for you to come, Mrs. Bullstone."

"And so would I like it, and perhaps I will, Bob," answered Margery. "Tell me more who was in the church."

"Miss Winter and Mr. Winter," began young Elvin, but Avis stopped him.

"Hush, Robert!" she said.

"No call to hush, Avis. I'm very glad they was there," declared Margery.

"They didn't come to Red House after, of course," continued Avis; "but a rally of neighbours did, and Bob's mother and his sailor brother sat by father, and Mr. Rupert Elvin, Bob's great-uncle, proposed the health of the bride."

"And Mr. Bullstone gave us a proper banquet—I never

saw such a spread and never shall again I'm sure," vowed Robert.

"Father was pretty cheerful I hope?" asked Margery, and Avis looked uncomfortable.

Robert answered.

"He was, because it was kept from him and all of us that you weren't very well to-day. And he told me that he'd hoped you might be there; but no doubt the reason against was your poor state, Mrs. Bullstone."

"Hush, Robert," said Avis.

"You must call me 'mother' now, Bob," replied Margery. "You've got two mothers now; and so has Avis."

"And very gay and proud I'm sure," said Robert. "And I'll send you a bit of good foreign fruit from Exeter, mother, to cheer you up."

"Don't you waste your money, Bob."

"You know Owley's mine, now, mother?" asked Avis.

"I do, and very good news; and I hope you thanked your father for it. Very few young people get such a fine start in life. A very good father to you, my dear."

Avis did not answer, but Robert felt constrained to do so.

"So I tell her, and I hope Mr. Bullstone won't never have cause to be sorry. God willing, he never shall."

"That's right, Bob. Avis have got you to thank also."

"And John Henry feels that, if I have Owley, he ought to have Bullstone," added Avis.

"All in good time I expect. Father will do fair and right by every one."

They talked a little longer, then Mrs. Huxam appeared.

"'Tis time you was away," she said. "Your grandfather and I and a few more are just walking down to see the train off, and the carriage is waiting for you and the luggage is at the station. So be off in five minutes. You'll be all right, Margery? I shan't be gone very long."

She departed and soon afterwards Avis and Robert bade the invalid 'good-bye.' She kissed them, then heard laughter and cheerful words below, looked out the window and

saw the carriage with two grey horses drive off. There was a white satin bow on the coachman's whip. She crept back to bed again and her heart throbbed. She had grown weaker, and she cried now, not at the emotion of the moment, but before the whole spectacle of her shattered life and maimed existence. In her present state she had ceased even to lament the failure of her last effort to return home. Now she felt that was no great matter. She was enfeebled, indifferent and had lost the will to live. But there grew in her one desire: a great wish to see her husband again and bid him farewell. None would help her on her side; but if he received a direct message from her, it was certain that Jacob would come.

She could no longer concentrate her mind for more than a few minutes at a time, and was sleeping when her mother returned to her.

CHAPTER XII

A PROBLEM FOR AUNA

JACOB BULLSTONE now did a thing he had not yet and sought Dr. Briggs, the medical man who was attending his wife. The physician had been Margery's doctor of old and knew her well. He allowed himself great latitude of language at the time of the separation and he entertained violent dislike of Jacob. Bullstone waited on him and, without concealing his aversion, the thin, grey-whiskered practitioner snapped his evil tidings.

"There is no reason, I imagine, why you should be kept in ignorance. Your wife, so to call her, is exceedingly ill, and the natural weakness, which I was able to combat pretty effectually of old, has now gone much further."

"She's taking iron I hope?" inquired Jacob, and the other regarded him with aversion.

"Need you ask? The iron has entered into her soul—not the iron I gave, however. You'll say I'm not professional and so forth. Perhaps you don't want to know the reasons for this collapse—only the extent of it. Perhaps you do know the reasons? At any rate I can repeat to you, as I have a dozen times to her parents, that the old tendency to anæmia, owing to certain obscure defects of the nourishing system and so forth, have, under her fearful mental trials, become chronic and are now developing the gravest symptoms. A few weeks ago she suffered from a sharp chill during the recent harsh weather. It threatened immediate danger; but I got her through that. You cannot, however, minister to a mind diseased."

"Perhaps the one that gave the poison might best find

the antidote," said Bullstone humbly, and the doctor looked at him with some bitterness.

"There's no antidote for this poison," he answered.

"And do you feel any reason to doubt that the spring will see a change for the better?"

"Seasons have nothing to do with it. She is little likely to see another spring. The constitution has broken and the will power has gone. She feels no desire to go on living, and I cannot create that desire in her. Nor can any of her family."

"Have they tried?"

"Naturally. You do not imagine they want her to die. With anæmia a patient gets ups and downs, which flatter hope, or increase fear. But we are far past these stages of the ailment. Her vitality ebbs with increasing quickness, and I cannot stem the tide."

"Do you not feel that a second opinion might be desirable?"

"I have taken a second opinion. Mr. Nettleship, of Plymouth, saw her several weeks ago."

"I was not told of that."

"Possibly not. He came one evening and took even a more serious view of the case than I did. The event has proved he was correct. He has devoted special study to the disease."

"Nothing can be done, then, Dr. Briggs?"

"Nothing that is not being done."

They parted and it was upon the same night—an occasion that found Jacob sleepless and in mental torment—that there broke upon him a great, unknown fact. Through Auna it came, three days after the wedding; but Auna herself had passed through a mighty ordeal and suffered much tribulation in her young mind, before she could bring herself finally to reveal the truth to her father. Long she fought, until at last, lying sleepless and worn out, she determined to tell Jacob what she knew. She rose, went to him then and there, found him awake and spoke.

It had happened thus. On the morning after the wedding of Avis, at Jacob's will, Auna set out immediately after breakfast for the post-office, to learn how her mother might be. On the way she was passed by Adam Winter, driving some pigs to the railway station, and he stopped and offered her a lift. Thus the duration of her journey was shortened and her heart was a little lifted by the man's cheerful words.

As others, who had known her mother of old, Adam saw Margery again in Auna—the slim, quick shape, the eager eyes, the steadfast cheerfulness. And Auna's devotion to her desolate father touched some hearts vaguely. The rest of the children had slipped away from him and loosened bonds never very tight; but she remained and still strove with youthful obstinacy to build up the broken walls of her home. Her life was largely spent in going backwards and forwards, and she seemed conscious of the significance of her task, for a sort of gravity now belonged to her. Her young face was moulded into a solemn expression and care clouded her eyes.

She told Adam that her mother was worse.

"Else I'm sure she'd have made a brave try to get to church yesterday, to see Avis married."

"I'm sure she would," he answered, "but no doubt her thoughts were there and you'll be able to tell her what a fine send-off they had—a good flash of sunshine and all."

"Father's taking it hard, and I'm going as quick as I may, in hopes to hear she's better."

"And I hope you will hear it. You'll be able to tell her what a good wedding it was—everything just perfect if she'd only been there. How does your father's leg go on?"

"Very clever he says. The pin bone was broke. And he's quite forgiven Sammy, because he knows that he never would have done it, if he'd been like other people, Mr. Winter."

"I'm very sure of that, Auna. Tell your father I'll come in and smoke a pipe along with him some night pretty soon. He didn't ought to be on his leg too much just yet I reckon—a heavy man like him."

At the station Auna alighted and arrived at the post-office an hour earlier than usual. The accident proved fruitful, for her grandmother, while expecting the girl, had no reason to suppose she would appear for some time. Judith was occupied in the post-office and Barlow had gone over to his son. Thus Auna slipped up to her mother's room quite unobserved. She was delighted; but Margery's appearance cast her down.

"Oh, dear, mother, you're as white as a dog's tooth!" she said.

Margery, however, flushed a little to see her.

"Come close, my pretty. I've slept ill; I'll be better presently. I've always got a headache now and I can't let down my food very clever."

"I've brought some of the goats' milk—fresh this morning."

"You're early to-day."

"Started early and got here ever so quick, because Mr. Winter was bringing in pigs and gave me a lift. Grandmother doesn't know I've come yet. Nobody does."

"Talk low then. She won't be up for half an hour, if she thinks I'm alone."

"Have you had a good breakfast?"

"Ever so good. How's father after the wedding?"

"Very sad indeed, because you're bad. Oh, mother, he'd have given all he's got in the world if he could have come this morning instead of me."

"He'd like to come?"

"You well know it. If you'd lift your little finger, he'd come."

Margery smiled.

"When I could lift my little finger, I didn't. Now I can't, perhaps——"

"But if he knew you even wanted to——"

"How's his leg, Auna?"

"Better and better. But Mr. Winter says he mustn't use it too much, because he's a heavy man. But he isn't as heavy as he was. He's thinner round the waist, mother."

"Is he? And is Adam Winter kindly to him?"

"Very kindly. He was cruel sorry for father's fearful fall. He'd have had Sammy put away, but father forgave him, and Sammy's forgot all about it now."

Margery reflected and stroked the girl's hand.

Their hands were very much alike, save that the elder's had grown thin and white.

"You must bear up at what I'm going to say, Auna; but I'm terrible afraid I'm going to die before so very long. Not afraid because I'm going to die. That's nothing to mind when you feel like I feel; but afraid because it will make you and father and the boys and Avis sorrowful."

"Going to die!" gasped Auna. "No, no, no, mother, don't 'e die yet a while! Think on father. If you died, he'd never be happy again, and he's been unhappy such a longful time now; and if you died, he'd die himself very likely."

"Perhaps I won't then. But I feel terrible bad. And you can tell father one thing. He wanted to see me, Auna, and he wanted me back at home?"

"Of course he did—cruel he wanted you back."

"But he didn't know I wanted to come back. You can tell him I wanted to come back. It may make him feel happier."

"But why didn't you come? Oh, mother, why didn't you?"

"I tried to come when I heard he wanted me. Yes, I tried. Only it was too late then. Things fell out and I couldn't do it. But tell him I tried and failed. It may comfort him to know I tried, Auna."

The door had opened an inch and somebody was listening

behind it; but neither Margery nor her daughter knew that they were overheard.

"Mother, mother," cried Auna, "if he had known—if he'd only known! Why, he'd have come for you himself, and the whole world wouldn't have kept him from you!"

"There were reasons why he shouldn't know till I'd got to him. But that's all one now. Wrong or right, you can tell father I tried. In time that will be good to him to remember."

"So I will then. Oh, if you'd only come, you'd have got well so quick! You must come yet. You must be drove in a shut-up cab all the way. I'll tell father you tried, and then——"

Mrs. Huxam entered, without any indication that she had overheard this vital matter.

"Why, Auna!" she said. "Here already—popped in like a mouse. Don't you tire mother. She's had a bad night."

"Mother looks terrible ill," said Auna.

Margery had turned away to the wall, for a wave of excitement made her heart beat painfully and she felt faint. Judith ministered to her.

"I expect mother's talked enough," she said. "The doctor hasn't seen her yet. I wouldn't leave the goats' milk, because it isn't the right thing for her now. You can take it over to Aunt Jane for the baby. It will be just right for him."

"So I will then," said Auna. "And I'll wait till Dr. Briggs has seen mother, so as I can tell father what he says."

Mrs. Huxam agreed to this arrangement.

"You'd better go then, and come back in half an hour," she said quietly. "I'll tell you what doctor says presently."

Auna kissed her mother, who lay with closed eyes, and after the kiss, she whispered, "I'll tell him." Then she went downstairs, carrying her little milk can. And when

she was gone, Judith spoke cheerfully to Margery, but made no mention of what she had overheard, though her mind was full of it. The old woman perceived a tremendous peril suddenly created by Margery's confession to Auna. A possibility existed of evading it; but the possibility was slight and the danger itself enormous. No instant disaster threatened, and yet the day could hardly end without bringing it. She saw a great battle lying immediately ahead and knew that for some temptations flight must be the only successful opposition. For the moment everything hinged upon Auna, and Auna was a broken reed in her grandmother's opinion. Auna had ceased to be single-hearted; she had never taken her stand, as her brothers and sister had taken it, on the side of religion and justice. Yet now into Auna's ears had been given a tremendous message—a message which might have been whispered by the devil himself rather than the poor victim of Bullstone's evil-doing. It was a message which, if it reached Margery's husband, would produce instant and violent response. Once let him know that Margery had so far condoned her wrongs as to attempt a return to Red House, and he might yet confound all, even in sight of salvation. For, from Judith's standpoint, salvation was now in sight. The message must not be delivered if she could prevent it, and she would have arrested Auna, locked her up, or taken any other direct action, had it been in her power to do so. But that was impossible; therefore she had asked the girl to return, in order to influence her and win a promise. At best, however, she doubted the value of a promise, even if she could win it. John Henry, Avis, or Peter she could have trusted to keep any promise given; Auna she did not trust, by virtue of the taint that made her put an erring father first in all things.

When presently her grandchild returned, Judith drew her into the little, front parlour, shut the door and set about her task. The doctor had offered scant shadow of hope and Mrs. Huxam perceived that he did not think

Margery would live. To her that was already an accepted fact. But she knew many worse dangers than death.

"Auna," she said. "I hope no grandchild of mine would ever tell a lie."

Auna reflected, looking straight into the calm, white face. Her answer indeed demanded no thought; but her mind was already concerned with what might have inspired the question.

She was so long in answering that Judith expressed displeasure.

"Surely, surely, you're not godless enough to want to think about it, Auna?"

"Of course not, grandmother. I'm sure none of us ever told you a lie. Why for should we?"

"The devil's very clever at putting people in a position where there's temptations to lie. It's one of his favourite traps for boys and girls, and they have to be warned against it from their youth up. Now listen, Auna; and mind this: your dear mother's soul may be the matter. Because first I may tell you, she has gone very weak of late—weak in body and mind by the will of God."

"I know she's terrible weak in body, and she thinks she may die of it even; but her mind is all right, grandmother."

"Her mind is all wrong," answered Judith. "That's what too well I know, and you do not. And now her mind has gone wrong, then it is for all that love her to be doubly anxious and careful."

"Yes," said Auna. "For all that love her."

"It's God's will that the strong should fight for the weak, and never more than when the weak have run into danger unknowing. Human weakness is the devil's strength, and he knows it, and where the sick creature is there will that old vulture, the devil, be hopping round about. I'm speaking of your mother's everlasting soul, Auna, not her body. And it pleases God sometimes to let us worms do His work, even in such a high matter as a

soul. Not long ago it was the Almighty's will that I should save your dear mother from a terrible danger. It was my blessing and pride and joy to come between my child and the devil, in all his fearful power and might; and a greater joy for a human parent God couldn't offer. That's done; the battle was won and your mother knows what I did for her. But while there's life in man, there's hope in the devil, and he's not done with mother yet."

Auna was indignant.

"The devil never had anything to do with dear mother," she said. "Nobody ever gave God less trouble than mother. She's good—good—and who don't know it?"

"Listen, and don't talk to me in that tone of voice. Just now, before you left her, it pleased the Lord that I should overhear what she was saying to you. I heard her tell you that she'd tried to go to Red House, didn't she?"

"Yes, grandmother."

"That was the devil, Auna—sleepless to catch your mother's soul; and the will to go was only less terrible than the deed. The deed was prevented; but now I've heard a very dreadful thing, because the will to do wrong may destroy the soul, just as well as the deed itself. And for that matter, Jesus Christ says one's as bad as the other."

She stopped to study the girl's face, but Auna only looked very sulky.

"And now," continued Mrs. Huxam, "you—you—her youngest child—have the blessed power to help your mother; and God's waiting and listening up in Heaven, to see if you will help her."

"I don't understand that."

"You will in a minute. You were told—not by your dear mother, Auna, but by the Evil One, who's often allowed to speak through our human lips, that she wanted to go back to Red House and couldn't; and she told you to tell your father that."

"So she did; and so I shall," answered Auna firmly.

"So you must not; that's why I was sent to overhear the fatal words and save you from repeating them to your father."

"I promised to, because mother thought it would make father happier; and so it will, granny; oh, it will do that when he knows."

"You promised, because you knew not why you promised, or who you promised. But you are not going to keep your promise, because to keep it would be threatening new danger to your mother's soul. A soul's never safe till it's out of the body, Auna. Always remember that. Many and many a soul has been lost on a death-bed, where the devil's grabbed them at the last moment."

"How would it hurt dear mother's soul to know that father was a little happier, granny?"

"It hurts your mother's soul to think on your father at all. I'm not your father's judge, and nothing that your mother, or anybody else, can do will alter the wages of such sins as his. And the way you act about your father is a very great sorrow to all of us; for you've been taught to know far better. But what matters now is that for your mother's sake—your dying mother's sake, Auna—he must not know what she said. Your mother's soul it may mean, for God wills that a soul shall hang on a thread above the bottomless pit sometimes; and such a little thing as a child's hand may push it down. Therefore the man must never know that your mother wanted to see him."

"Why not?" asked Auna. "How will it be bad for dear mother's soul that she's made poor father a little bit happier? Hasn't he had enough to bear?"

"You ask why. John Henry wouldn't ask why, nor yet Peter, nor Avis."

"I love my father a long sight better than they do; and I'm full of a great wanting to make him happier; and so's mother—full of a great wanting to do it too. And father's full of a cruel, fierce wanting to make her a bit

happier if only he could get to her. And if he knew she was dying and longed to see him——”

Auna broke down and wept bitterly, while Mrs. Huxam considered. She pretended to assume a situation not as yet attained.

“Don’t cry, but do your duty like a good girl, and leave the rest in Higher Hands, as we all must. There’s a holy word that tells how a ‘backbiting tongue hath cast out virtuous women, and deprived them of their labours; and whoso harkeneth to it shall never find rest.’ That’s what you are doing now, Auna, and neighbouring with one whose sentence is known and understood. But your Saviour may rescue you yet I hope. All you need to do now is to think on your poor, wronged mother, who has been deprived of her labours and is going to die. But she mustn’t be robbed of her heavenly home as well—not by any word of yours. And so you promise, on your word of honour before God Almighty, not to tell your father, or any other living creature, what you heard from mother’s lips this morning.”

Auna began to see the object of this solemn command.

“You think that father, knowing that, would dash to dear mother willy-nilly?” she asked.

This, indeed, was the terror that now crowded close over Judith. She spoke and thought with absolute sincerity, believing that any contact with Jacob Bullstone now might largely endanger her daughter’s hope of salvation. Indeed she felt the peril to be terrific—a direct encounter between herself and the Powers of Darkness. They were hard at work, as she expected them to be. Even did Auna finally give her word, such was the girl’s apparent reaction to the influence of her father, that Mrs. Huxam already looked ahead and planned the next step. She was not going to trust her granddaughter in any case. Auna at least perceived the immediate peril and her grandmother answered her question.

“I fear it; for these awful threats are allowed by God,”

Judith replied. "I think if your lost father was to hear this, a great and terrible thing might happen, for he'd believe that it was your mother's real voice, because his eyes are darkened to truth, and he'd think this devil's message came from herself. The devil says that the next best thing to getting your mother back to Red House is to let your father know she wanted to come back. Therefore I'll beg you this instant moment, Auna, to promise me before the great, living God that you'll be dumb about it and not act the devil's messenger. Why do you hesitate? What are you made of? Is your mother's soul nothing to you?"

Judith went down on her knees and drew Auna beside her; but still the girl did not speak. She had not the bent of mind to echo the attitude of her grandmother, or respond to the awful convictions of the elder. But she was impressed. She knew that her grandmother had a deep knowledge of the next world, and she believed very firmly indeed that there were such places as heaven and hell. The idea that her mother might by the remotest possibility lose heaven, stung Auna sharply. From sorrow and terror, she began to grow dazed at this terrible glimpse into the snares that awaited even saintly souls. Was it possible that not her sad-eyed mother, but a crafty fiend lurking behind her pale lips, had said these things? For a moment she forgot her father, and then, under the stressful words of Judith, she promised not to tell him. But the very act of promising brought him back to her. Whether a devil had spoken them or not, it was very certain that the words she had heard from her mother would be of the utmost consolation and comfort to her father. That Auna knew exceedingly well; yet she had now promised; and she hated her grandmother as her young heart had never before hated any living thing.

Having sworn, she escaped without another word, and Judith perceiving the girl's suffering and hearing the panting indignation that followed her surrender, felt very

far from certain that she would keep her oath. She believed that, as surely as Jacob Bullstone heard his wife had tried to come back to him, he would return to her and force his way into her presence, with the strength of a madman if need be; and she knew that between that inevitable sequel, with its possible consequences for Margery, there stood only the exceeding frail barrier of a wayward grandchild's promise. It was not enough for any margin of security and every mental energy must now be poured into the problem now confronting her—so Judith felt. She fell upon her knees again and remained for half an hour as motionless as the chair over which she bent. Then she rose, her mind affirmed and her decision taken. She perceived that an issue so tremendous could not be left to the doubtful honour of Auna, while she herself might take more certain steps to protect her child.

And meantime the girl went home in deepest tribulation. She had never lied, and for a long time her sorrow centred in the thought that she had given a promise not possible to break. Once she stopped and turned back, suddenly fired to see her grandmother again and take back her oath. But she knew that would be vain. She had promised and there could be no escape save through falsehood. Auna believed a lie to be among the deepest of crimes; yet in half an hour she was pursuing trains of thought that did not embrace her own soul's safety, but only her parents. Her mind ran wholly on her father first, and then upon her mother. A human instinct inclined her to doubt whether the outlook in the next world was as dangerous as her grandmother declared.

She hated going home at all now. She dawdled, wandered by the river, felt her heart full of a great pity for her father that this most precious information must be denied him.

"But of course it's no good telling dear father what the devil said," she reflected; and then, pursuing this melancholy thought, another arose out of it and Auna sat by

the stream and stayed her progress, quite weighed down by an arrestive idea.

If the devil could talk through her dear mother's lips, then, surely, nothing that anybody said was quite safe, for it followed that other people might also be subjected to his dreadful cunning and innocently voice his purpose. And if so, why not her grandmother as well as anybody else? Evidently natural goodness could be no safeguard, for she knew her mother to be as good as an angel in heaven. Her father had said so a thousand times. Perhaps, indeed, thought Auna, the devil delighted to make the most saintly people his mouthpiece. It was such an added infamy as she could understand might well gratify him. But, in that case, her grandmother was the least likely to escape these awful attentions; and if the Evil One had been whispering to Auna through her mother's lips, was it not possible, nay probable, that he had also been speaking with the voice of Mrs. Huxam? Then the human mind of her, quickened by love to deal in sophistry, reflected on another argument. She had promised her grandmother one thing; but not before she had promised her mother an opposite thing. She could not, therefore, escape a lie. Only a choice of lies awaited her in any case.

Auna rose and proceeded home. She suddenly remembered how Jacob was waiting impatiently for news, and the question of the promise sank into a minor matter before the immediate necessity to tell him her mother was very ill. More than that Auna did not intend to say. She was not going to speak of death, because she had a suspicion that her grandmother had exaggerated the danger to frighten her and extort her promise.

She told her father of the grave condition reported and he was deeply perturbed. On the following day he visited the doctor with results already chronicled, and Peter it was who during this morning went to the post-office for news of Margery. He returned with the information that

she was about the same; and upon Auna asking him if she was still so very white, Peter answered that she was. But later, when she was alone with her brother in the evening, there came the tremendous secret information that finally sent Auna in the small hours of the next day to her father's room.

For Peter was no hand at secrets and confessed to Auna that he had not seen their mother at all. His grandfather had bade him keep the information to himself for the present; but none the less Peter told Auna, commanding profound silence from her. Their mother had left Brent.

"Grandmother's took her away for a change," explained Peter. "And grandfather was awful down about it and in a proper fret. He says that mother's soul have got to be saved, and he said now was the appointed time. But where mother's been took to, to save her soul, I don't know, and grandfather wouldn't tell me. And I swore I wouldn't let it out; but it's so interesting I had to tell somebody. You don't matter so long as father doesn't know; and if he did it's no odds, I reckon, for he couldn't find her."

"You've told a lie, then," mused Auna, and her brother, somewhat uneasy, began to argue the point; but she was not blaming him.

"Nothing ever happens that didn't ought, anyway," said Peter. "Grandmother's told us that a million times, and it gets you round a good few corners—lies included—to remember it."

"So it does," admitted Auna.

She took this great information to bed with her, and after many sleepless hours could endure it no longer but crept to her father. Jacob lay awake, for he suffered deep misery over his wife's illness, while still far from any guess that extreme danger had developed. He had discounted the conversation with Dr. Briggs, perceiving that the medical man desired to hurt him, and he supposed that with time Margery would grow stronger again, as she had after previous periods of weakness. It was not

yet a year since he had driven her away from him, and he could not believe that she had sunk beyond hope of rising again to health within so short a time. But troubled he was, for the ultimate reconciliation seemed no nearer. Christmas approached and he considered if at that date he might endeavour to break down the opposition. His thoughts again turned to Jane and Jeremy, then to Barlow Huxam himself. They had taken no notice of him at the wedding, but he had caught Mr. Huxam's eye and, though the postmaster looked away instantly, there had been no active enmity in his countenance. Jacob thus dawdled on the brink of sleep, unhappy enough, careworn enough, clinging to such shadowy hopes as rolled from time to time uppermost in the welter of thought.

Then came Auna and he lighted his candle, tucked her into bed and listened to her.

Once started the girl could not stop until she had told everything.

"Peter's lied and I'd sooner lie with Peter than keep my word with grandmother, and if the devil can make one person talk, why shouldn't he make another? And mother didn't sound in the least like the devil, and grandmother did," wept Auna pursuing her own reflections, but throwing no immediate light upon the reason for her nocturnal visit.

Jacob calmed her down and so learned, little by little, what his daughter desired him to know. It was impressed upon him that Margery was actually at the point of death, that she had endeavoured to come to him and failed, because Mrs. Huxam had prevented it; and that she had now been taken away by her mother—but whither Peter was not told.

Leaving this cruel load of knowledge with her parent, and surprised in her heart to find confession had so greatly calmed her spirit, Auna went back to bed and soon slept peacefully; while Jacob rose and dressed and prayed for the first glimmer of the day that would launch him upon

his quest. Enormous joy and profoundest grief clashed within him. A great hope dawned with the morning: that he and Margery might yet come together and that her body's salvation lay with him.

No bird had broken silence and only the sleepless river purred under a clear, white heaven as he rode out. Above him the morning star shone, like a nail of gold on a field of ivory, and lifting his heart to the hills round about him, Jacob found his mood calm, patient, inexorably determined. He had never thought to wield such a weapon as Auna had now put into his hands; but no adverse power could stand against it, for it came direct from Margery herself. She had striven to reach him and failed. Now it was his turn.

CHAPTER XIII

AT THE BARBICAN

MRS. HUXAM had made up her mind and conscious that the period of danger must now be brief, determined to take Margery beyond it. That she was in no case to travel did not influence her mother, who dealt with issues far more tremendous than life or death. Indeed, so absolutely was human instinct quelled by the more potent fervours of faith, that the old woman experienced not one pang of mental suffering before the physical suffering she now caused.

Salvation only lay by way of flight, for Auna could not be trusted. She explained to Barlow what she was about to do, bade him get a closed carriage as quickly as possible, herself sent a telegram to Lawrence Pulleyblank at Plymouth, and within an hour had dressed Margery and set off upon the long and secret drive to her brother's home.

The sick woman protested, but she had no strength to oppose. Judith took food with her and at Plympton stopped and made Margery drink a hot cup of tea. To her daughter's repeated questions as to why this had been done, Mrs. Huxam promised a future answer. She concealed her purpose during the journey and, before they had reached the house on the Barbican, Margery was past questions. She sank into a great silence, which was never again broken, and she appeared to be nearly unconscious when they arrived. Mr. Pulleyblank, full of wonder and pity, himself picked her up and carried her to the room she always occupied when visiting him. Then, when she was settled in and a doctor sent for, Judith explained to her brother,

"Thank God we're in sight of victory!" she said with exulting eyes. "Margery's dying, by the blessing of her Maker; but the devil have had a hard tussle for her. With her last remaining strength he forced her to try and get back to Jacob Bullstone; and she'd have been found dead with her sins upon her, but for me. I saved her, and now we've only got to block the man for a little longer. Then she'll escape for ever. It's been a fight, Lawrence. I've shortened my life for Margery. Perhaps I've shortened hers; but that's a small thing. A dumbness has come upon her. The Lord has sealed her lips for safety."

"Dying!" he said. "D'you mean to tell me my pretty bird's really dying?"

"Quickly, I do hope and pray. Bringing her here will hasten it. You see so long as the man didn't know she wanted to go back, he was powerless; but once it gets to him that she did want to, then well I know he'll be on us like Apollyon. The Evil One used her. I heard him speak to her child, through her lips, and the child, Auna, looked a lie though she promised not to give the message. I couldn't trust her; but it's no odds now—not even if Bullstone does hear it, for Barlow will withstand him."

"And if he came here, so would I," said Mr. Pulleyblank. "Better the poor dear goes down to her grave this minute than listen to any word from that villain."

His sister gave details and presently a doctor came, heard particulars of Margery's physical state, and expressed dismay that she had been taken upon a journey. But Mrs. Huxam did not trouble herself to regret his strictures, and that he should think her an ignorant woman was no grief to her. He could do nothing, but directed how best to relieve the patient and desired to send in a nurse. This, however, Judith refused to permit.

"I'll nurse her," she said. "I'm her mother."

The physician called again at a later hour, but Margery, though a trifle stronger, was only semi-conscious. He

warned them that she could hardly survive the night, but promised to return in the morning. The sick woman slept heavily and seemed no worse when day broke. This fact Judith telegraphed to Barlow; and he had repeated it when his grandson arrived from Red House for news.

But during that day Margery began to sink, and she had passed far into the shadow on the following morning, when Jacob at dawn rode to his father-in-law. For he had saddled a horse, being unable to trust his leg to walk to Brent. He trembled with anger to think that she had wanted him, and sought him, and been denied; but against his indignation there rose one satisfaction. That she was well enough to travel reconciled him in some measure to the fact that she had done so. Her state, he reflected, must be better than was reported if she could make even a brief journey. He felt tolerably sure that she had gone to her uncle at Plymouth and, ignorant of the truth, wondered why his mother-in-law thus attempted an impossible thing. For to keep him from Margery, now that he knew that she wanted to come back to him, was impossible. No power existed competent legally to stand between them now; and when presently he arrived at the post-office after daybreak, while a winter sun glinted over the edge of the earth, he asserted this fact to Barlow Huxam.

The postmaster was already up, waiting with anxiety for news by letter or telegram from Plymouth; for while Judith had inspired him with her own fervour and won his entire support two days before, now, alone, faced with the dreary ordeal of waiting for tragic news and stricken by the knowledge that he would never see Margery again, Mr. Huxam had fallen into a nervous and melancholy agitation.

He was not much astonished to see Jacob. Indeed he greeted him without emotion, called a boy to hold the rider's horse and bade him enter.

"Barlow Huxam," said Bullstone. "One word is as good as a thousand in this matter. I hear that some time

ago my wife wanted to come back to her home, and to me. She was withstood, and that's contrary to law as you well know. She's ill—very ill so doctor says—and she has been taken away against her own wish. You're an honourable Christian and I've wronged you and yours, and have confessed it and suffered as few are called to suffer. But now—now that my wife wants me, and actually tried to come to me, I ask you, man to man, to tell me where her mother has taken her. Not for regard of myself do I ask it, but for Margery's sake. Be merciful in this matter, as you'd ask for mercy if you stood where I stand."

"Mercy is not for us," answered Barlow. "And if I wanted to show mercy I could not, because it's not in my power. And who knows what mercy is? What you want may not be mercy at all. In your ignorance you may be asking for worse things than you've earned even, or your Maker intends."

"Let that all go. I'm not here to split religious straws. She wants me, and are you to stand between your sick daughter and one she's forgiven for his sins and wants again? Are you going to prevent her from coming back to the home she's made, and the home she's loved? It might be the turning point; it might save her and make her strong again to come back to all that's so dear to her."

Mr. Huxam was affected, more by the appearance of Jacob than his words. He perceived now, in the presence of the man and in the sound of his voice, something of what had happened to him. And there was worse to happen, for Bullstone spoke in ignorance of the situation. Yet for the moment, while moved, Barlow preserved an attitude laid down by his wife, and felt no inclination to yield.

"I must tell you things that you're not likely to understand," he answered. "As to splitting religious straws, I never have, nor never will do it. But we're concerned not with straws, but large, deep mysteries; and one of

them has happened. And you must clearly understand that in my judgment and my wife's, it was not any heartfelt wish of Margery's to see you that Auna heard."

"What was it then? She tried to come; she told Auna that she wanted to come—to come to me, and wanted me to come to her."

"Auna heard those words," admitted Huxam, "but who shall say that Margery spoke them? In the shadow of death she lies, and we well know that while there's life there's fear—fear of death—not the death of the body, but the soul."

He elaborated this opinion, while the other stared, hearing Judith Huxam rather than her husband.

"Oh, God—to what you and the likes of you can come!" he said. "You—the father of her, who have seen her sinless, spotless life, and the good she has done and the evil she has suffered—you to think her a mouthpiece for a devil. What do you make of God? Are you so blind that you don't know goodness and honour and patience when you see them? Let me speak with the tongues of the pit, if you please; flout me—condemn me—spit upon me. That is just; but to stand there—a man experienced in life, who knows human nature and believes in an all-powerful, all-loving Father—to stand there and tell me that her natural, woman's longing to see the home she made, and her heavenly forgiveness, ready to return to a worthless man like me—to say all that was the devil whispering through her lips—why, what damned filth do you believe about heaven and hell?"

Barlow felt a twinge before this indictment. He was too prone to accept Judith's interpretation of all that happened, too prone to assume that earnestness so tremendous and a faith that could move mountains, must of necessity enable his wife to probe more deeply into truth than saner people.

"Use your reason," added Jacob. "I've come of late through much torment of mind and grief of body, to see

that reason's a gift of God, without which we fall back very quickly into the night of our forefathers. It was loss of reason that ruined me and my home. Let faith do her work, Barlow Huxam, but don't flout reason with nonsense about devils, or tell me that a saint like Margery could ever be the plaything of the Enemy of Mankind. Think for one moment, with the brains God gave you to use, and you'll know that is a foul, mad thought—a thought far liker to be bred of the devil than any that your daughter's mind could harbour, or her lips speak. She wants to see me and her home again; and I ask you, as one well thought upon for sense and human wisdom, if it will throw any shadow on her white soul to hold my hand, and let me hear her forgive me. You're married. You know the deep bond that makes woman and man one sooner or later, no matter how vast the gulf that folly and ignorance, or wickedness, may rip up between them. You know that a sinner may repent and be forgiven; and if by God, then why not by his own, faulty, fellow-creatures? She wants to come to her home, Barlow. She wants to come to her home, and there's no right or justice in hiding her, knowing that if she was strong enough she would come back to me. She's ill—terribly serious her illness—then so much the more reason that a wish, that may be among her last wishes, should be granted. Don't stand in the way any more. If I thought that I would do her harm, in body or soul, I wouldn't ask; but who am I to do her harm? I'm human. I've done all the harm I shall ever do. My life—what's left—will be bent on atoning and doing good—first to her, then to the rest of the world. I only live for that. My own life is but a means for that. Oh, man, don't you understand what my days are now—what I've made of them? Can you come between me and the last ray of light that's left for me?"

"A soul is in the balance," said Mr. Huxam uneasily.

"Granted. But whose soul? Not hers—not Margery's. You're not going to pretend that anything I could say,

or do, will endanger a soul as far above me as light above darkness. Say my soul's in the balance if you like, and pray God's mercy on a sinful and erring man. Be large-hearted even for me. We don't make ourselves. We don't sit at the Almighty's elbow when He plans us, and tell Him what to put into us; we can't stand beside Him fortified with the experience of human life and say, 'Make me brave; make me honest; make me patient; leave lust out of me; leave jealousy out of me.' We don't ask God to fashion us true and plumb, of stuff fine enough to withstand the trials and temptations common to all flesh. We can't demand faith, or sense, or the power to move our neighbour to goodness by example and precept. We have no hand in our havage, no hand in our understanding, no hand in our weakness of will. Then what, in the name of Christ, is left for us but to be merciful one with another? What is left but for the strong to deal tenderly with the weak? You stand among the strong ones. You've been blessed with a clear head, good health, perseverance, self-control and a sense of reality that keeps your mind sweet. You married a strong woman. You rise above the traps and snares of life and go your appointed way. You had a good daughter, married to an erring and faulty man. And he's ruined her life and brought her through dark places, where such a woman should never have had to tread. But she's not tainted—there's no stain on her—and now—now, at the eleventh hour, she stretches out her hands to him. And who knows best? Do you know better than she does? Is her mother wiser than she is? God tells her to want me, Barlow—God—God! For His own ends—for His own ends."

The other did not speak. This appeal, coming on his own knowledge that his daughter was dying, distressed him much. But it was still the face staring into his—a face written closely over with intense pain—a face haggard and a head growing grey—that caused him more misery than Jacob's words.

Barlow began to cry, where he was sitting, with his hand on his forehead by a table, and the tears fell down.

Bullstone said no more for some time. Then he spoke again—a brief entreaty.

“Help me to believe in the justice of God,” he said. “Don’t take my last hope. If she is so ill, do not deny me the one and only blessing left to me in this world: to see her again before the end.”

“Who shall come between a man and his Maker?” asked Huxam. “Who can do that, Jacob? I wish my wife was here. Perhaps you would have thrown a light for her. It’s contrary to reason to suppose such a woman should be led wrong, but so it is contrary to reason to suppose that Margery should be led wrong. I grant that—I grant that. I never did like to think it was the devil in her. No—no. You’re right there. The Lord don’t desert His jewels in the Dark Valley. That’s where He’s nearest and strongest. Perhaps, in her fine fury to save her child, my wife overlooked a thing or two.”

There came a knock at the door.

“A telegram for you, Mr. Huxam,” said the post-office clerk, and Barlow took it from her hands. There was but one word: ‘Sinking.’ He held it out to Jacob and then he spoke.

“Come,” he said. “We’ll go together. And God must do as He pleases.”

“Where is she?”

“At Plymouth along with her uncle.”

Mr. Huxam looked at his watch, then put it into his pocket hurriedly.

“We can just catch the eight-thirty down. Go forward and get two tickets. I’ll come after you.”

In twenty minutes they were on their way to Plymouth in a third-class carriage, empty save for themselves.

Two immense facts strove in Barlow’s mind and presently he spoke, trying with the one to condone the other.

“Death goes before all,” he said. “Before death all

doors are opened. Therefore my wife must pardon me for doing a thing she will not easily understand. It would be well if we pardoned oftener where we don't understand, Jacob."

The other was staring from the window and hardly heard.

"What is that to me? See you to that yourself," he answered.

The slow train seemed bent on torturing both men by its delay. It stopped to pick up a cattle-truck and a horse-box at Ivybridge. It dawdled again outside Plymouth. Nearly an hour had passed before they reached Millbay and took a cab.

"You must prepare for the worst, for I think she's gone," said Barlow. "I feel terrible certain that it is so, Jacob; and if that has happened, I beg and pray you'll make no great upstore about it."

The younger shook his head.

"You cannot know she's gone. We may be in time."

At the moment he spoke Margery, indeed, still lived, but was on the brink of death and only drew faint and fitful breaths. Her mother sat by her and held her hand. She did not know if any measure of consciousness remained, but spoke without ceasing in a flood of texts and exhortations. She was very white and drawn. She stopped presently and put down her head to listen; but still the woman's breast flickered, though the breath could not be heard.

"You'll soon be with the Lamb; you'll soon be with the Lamb. You'll soon wear your heavenly crown, my pretty," Judith kept saying. She longed for the end, but felt no fear now. Then, upon her security, came the sound of wheels over the cobbled street. They stopped at the door and, instantly alert, fearing harm, she hastened to the window and saw, first Jacob, then her husband, alight. Jacob pushed straight into the house, but Barlow stopped a moment to pay the cabman.

Mrs. Huxam rushed to the door and screamed to her brother who was below.

"Lawrence, quick for God's sake! Stop him—hit him down if he won't stop!"

Then she returned to the sick-room and locked the door of it.

"Death—death come to her! God take her home, God take her home!" she implored on her knees by the bed; and now her ears were first strained for voices below and then brought back to her child. Others might have supposed that Margery was beyond reach of any danger; but not so Mrs. Huxam. With Jacob's arrival an awful dread came upon her and a fury of fear. For who could tell what spark of consciousness remained to receive the contagion of her husband's speech? Noisy voices were raised below. Then her husband spoke swiftly and silenced the others. She heard him coming upstairs, while her brother and Jacob followed. If they defied her they might easily break the door down, for the devil was most surely with them. Her mind worked furiously, broken free of reason, stung to passion and fierce hatred of the evil forces now creeping upon her child's soul. Margery lay as good as dead. Each senseless breath was delayed longer than the last; while salvation's gate stood open, with her Saviour standing at the portal.

Lawrence Pulleyblank spoke from the other side of the door.

"Barlow and the man. 'Tis well and in reason they should come, Judith. They've made me see that. It's God's wish he should——"

The devil was now in her brother's heart also; and he must have captured her husband's, otherwise Barlow would not be there. Judith saw the trail of the Enemy step by step—Auna's broken promise, Jacob deluding Huxam, winning him and now at the door, in this supreme moment, to catch his prey—a masterpiece of craft and cunning.

"Open for God's love, Mrs. Huxam," implored Bullstone.

"Open, Judy—'tis all ordained that he should see her

once more," entreated Barlow. But she neither opened nor answered. She prayed for time. She bent close to Margery and believed her dead. She made herself believe it. Her hand trembled over the woman's mouth. She rested it there a moment. Then came another faint suspiration. What was one worthless breath, more or less, against eternity? She took her hand off again and listened.

Now Lawrence Pulleyblank sternly bade his sister open the door; but still she refused, answering nothing. Then she heard that they were breaking it down.

She went back quickly to the bed, while blows fell slowly from some heavy object with which the men were battering.

In two minutes the door crashed open, and Jacob, followed by the others, entered.

They saw Mrs. Huxam standing before them with a great light blazing in her eyes and her features distorted. She appeared to be insane.

"To God be the praise! To God be the praise! To God be the praise!" she shrieked. Then she flung up her arms; the flame went out of her countenance and she fell forward and fainted.

Where the bed stood, a sheet had been drawn up over Margery's face. Jacob approached and turned it down. Then he knelt and bent close to her. Warmth rose from his wife; her open eyes were still lustrous and reflected his in their unwavering mirrors; but she breathed no more. He kissed the grey shadow of the lips he had known so red, gazed steadily upon her, pressed the hands crossed on her breast, then rose and went away quietly, for he knew that she was dead.

BOOK III

CHAPTER I

'MOTHER'S STONE'

ADAM WINTER and William Marydrew were walking home side by side from the funeral of Margery Bullstone. Both wore black broadcloth and soft, black felt hats, but there was a touch of colour about the elder, for a red wool muffler wrapped his throat. Billy stopped after climbing the steep hill from Lydia Bridge to the hamlet above; then he drew a little bone box from his pocket and took snuff.

"The man held in all right; but it's the calm before the storm for certain," said William. "He's raging a good bit. They didn't ought to have hid her dying state from him, or kept 'em apart after they knew she wanted to come home."

"They did not," answered Winter, "and yet my aunt, who knows Mrs. Huxam very well, tells me it was done for high religious reasons, William."

"She hadn't been dead a minute, poor woman, afore Jacob smashed in the door of the room; but he had this consolation from Lawrence Pulleyblank, that his wife had been unconscious for hours and couldn't have known him, even if he'd come in time to see her alive."

"The call on faith gets heavier as we grow older, William. Life, after a certain age, seems no more than a cry for patience and a test of pluck. Don't you think my faith be growing weak; but 'tis only human to be down-daunted sometimes afore the things that happen."

"But when you come to my years, such things be different from what they are to you men in the fifties. As

a general rule you'll find great deceits in men and women, deceits done for fineness as well as for poorness of spirit. Those who look to be happiest, Adam, are sometimes only the bravest, and them who have most to grumble at often grumble least. And there be some like dogs, without care, yet, out of their cowardice, will begin to yelp if they see so much as the shadow of a stick."

"He was pretty patient—for him—afore this break-up."

"And will be again, if his mind holds. There's a great strain on his thinking parts for the minute; and I hope they'll stand to him."

"I was a good bit surprised to see she'd gone in along with the Bullstones. I'd have thought now that them, as kept her from him so jealous in life, would have fought to have her buried with her father's family," mused Winter.

"Judith Huxam fell ill after Margery died, and Barlow was in a good deal of trouble for a minute. In fact he found himself too busy to bother about the funeral," answered William.

"All her children stood beside the grave—in fact everybody belonging to her except her mother."

"A funeral be nought to the old witch doctor. When the soul have flown to safety, that's all she troubles for. The dust would be no more to her than the empty acorn shard when the young oak springs up. I wrestled with her once, for I'll always say that if her daughter had come home, she might have been spared; but Judith Huxam treated me as though I was an imp of darkness, with the mark of the toasting-fork on my brow."

George Middleweek overtook them. He, too, was in black and had been at the funeral. With him came Peter Bullstone in a new, black suit.

The young man was subdued. He nodded but did not speak.

"How's your grandmother this morning?" inquired Adam. "I couldn't ask anybody that knew."

"She's better—very near well I believe."

Peter then pushed forward alone and George spoke.

"Hope us shall have a bit of peace to Red House now. Merry hell I can tell you for all parties since this happened."

"Is he calming?" asked Adam.

"He's been calm since the corpse came to Red House—calm by day, but not by night. He's pretty broke up. And women as usual at the bottom of all his troubles. Blast 'em, they be at the bottom of most. Why don't we keep 'em like cows or sheep—in herds—and only use 'em for breeding men? They'll always be a canker and a curse so long as we treat 'em like we do."

"This is your silly way of showing sorrow for your master, George," said Mr. Marydrew. "You mean well, though you talk foolishness. But you must keep your reason in bounds and put a bit on your tongue, or you won't help him."

"I'd help him with truth if I could," answered the other. "He's a chap lost in a fog of misery, that's half rubbish if he could see it. He's cussed Providence—that's something to the good; and from cussing, he'll soon get like me, to fling Providence over altogether. I'm damn bad myself, and none the worse for that I believe."

George elaborated his opinions with a good deal of ferocity. It was his way of expressing sympathy with Jacob Bullstone, a fact that William had appreciated.

"Come, come," said Billy, "you ain't half the sinner you want us to think, my dear. 'Tis just a habit you've fallen into, George—to frighten us all with your fearful wickedness. But you didn't ought only to talk of it; you ought to do some wicked things, so as we can believe in you—eh, Adam?"

Mr. Winter was of simpler understanding.

"If he don't believe in Providence, he's about wicked enough," answered the farmer.

A mourning coach conveying Jacob and Auna drove past the pedestrians. Bullstone had stopped to see the

earth returned to his wife's grave, and Barlow Huxam had stopped with him.

Auna sat beside her father and held his hand. She did not attempt to speak. He had leaned back in the carriage and shut his eyes. When they reached Red House, he roamed away up the valley and Auna took off her new mourning frock and went about her business.

Jacob did not return to dinner, and presently his daughter set out to find him.

"I'd come," said Peter, "but he'll do more for you. The dark will soon be down—so best you not go far."

Auna took a couple of dogs and started to seek her father. She believed that she knew where he would be, and she was right. He sat on a mossy stone two miles up the valley. It was a spot dedicated of old to Margery and the stone, carved by time into a natural resting-place, had long been known to her children as "Mother's Stone."

Jacob addressed Auna as though he were expecting her. He was very quiet for the moment; but she feared his look. His hat was off and his hair was rough, for he had been running his hands through it.

"A great thought—to put this stone on her grave," he said. "Here she sat a thousand times, and it belongs to her. It's her stone, Auna. You can't give the dead much. And yet to give her a stone—her I denied bread——"

"Don't say that, dear father. Perhaps it would be a beautiful thing if the stone were set up to her."

"Just as it is, mind. No tinkering it—just as it is—because she rested here. But that's all one. She shall have her stone, if parson lets me put it up; and her name shall be cut upon it."

"I'm sure he'll let you, father."

"But no cross. She's born her cross in life; the cross I put on her; the cross she broke down and died under. I'll bear her cross now, and if men was to come and say 'Jacob Bullstone, we be going to crucify you on your wife's cross,' I should thank God and glory in it."

"Don't you talk wild like that. Come home. It's getting dark and offering for rain. I'm so glad about the stone. Mother will like that; and you mustn't think she's dead, father."

"We'll meet again—in the earth. I'll lie next to her, as close as graves are allowed. I'll get to her, bone to her bone, ashes to her ashes, dust to her dust some day."

She comforted him to the best of her powers and he rose and took his hat from her and put it on. It was dark before they returned, and then he lighted a lamp and went to his own room. There they heard him busy with the drawers of the big wardrobe he had bought for Margery.

George Middleweek advised that he should be left alone. Auna called him to supper and he came quietly and appeared to be more calm and controlled. But he spoke of feeling very weary and began to talk concerning Huntingdon. He declared his determination to leave Red House as soon as possible and henceforth live at the warrens. His children listened and Peter was secretly fired with great hopes that his father might keep his word. Already he saw himself master of the dogs.

CHAPTER II

DRIVING IN THE PONIES

FOR a season the soul of Jacob shrank from all life and found its only peace in solitude. Now and again, for a day or two, the wish to be alone would leave him; then he would go to Marydrew, or Adam Winter, and pour out a flood of futile opinions. They bore with him and strove to restore his peace. But he would soon seclude himself again and, on one or two occasions, he spent the night alone at Huntingdon. He had determined to dwell there in time to come; but those that cared for him trusted that before spring returned he would change his mind. William, when opportunity offered, pressed occupation on his friend and assured him that only by way of work would serenity return; but Jacob could not work. His restlessness drove him to be moving always. He left his business in the hands of Peter and was impatient if either he, or George Middleweek, even desired his advice.

He would not see a doctor. He declared that the physician who attended upon his wife had poisoned his mind against all doctors. But he spoke kindly of his own attendant at the Cottage Hospital. Sometimes he was violent and blasphemed before his children. He often went to his wife's grave, to see if the soil were sinking. Auna was glad on the days that he chose to do this, because it made him easier. His furies seldom extended to any at Red House, though he turned much against John Henry and Avis, because they did not come to see him. Once or twice he set out to visit them on horseback, yet always changed his mind and rode into the moor instead.

Auna often begged to come with him when he wandered away; but he rarely suffered her to do so. For a time he seemed indifferent even to her—a phase that represented the extremity of his distemper.

“You’re too much like your mother,” he told her once. “I doubt I’ll be able to endure you much longer. It’s living with her ghost, rather than her child.”

In one of his wildest moods he had said that; but she knew he did not mean it. He was careless of his garments and person now and looked to Auna for a thousand attentions—indeed had long done so.

She suspected that her father wanted to die and asked old William what should be done about it; but Mr. Marydrew advised nothing.

“Let him go his own gait,” he told her. “If he dies, he dies; but more like he’ll grow easier and come back to himself presently.”

Jacob brought news from the moor. His values had all changed and sometimes a sort of peace did crown his lonely days; but it was not a sane peace. He talked as though human beings signified nothing; he lifted the unconscious creatures and their good and evil to first place in his speech and showed an interest in the prosperity of the coneys, the welfare of the fox and her cubs, the providence of the badger and his shifts to live through the naked winter months. At no time could it be said that he spoke as one insane; but he hovered on the brink of mental disaster and displayed a distortion of perspective akin to craziness.

George Middleweek suspected that Bullstone was concealing himself behind a pretence; but Adam Winter, to whom he explained his view, knew Jacob better.

“He couldn’t pretend,” he said. “His brains are on the knife’s edge. All we can hope is that his bodily strength will save him, and that his mind will right itself.”

They debated whether speech or silence was the better for Jacob, and agreed that his passion, venting itself in words,

served to let the poison free. The occasional periods of taciturnity, when Jacob would not speak, or eat, or even move sometimes for many hours, they believed the more dangerous signals. So they watched him and did what they might, which was little; while Auna, grown to a woman in mind, kept as near to her father as possible, studied his every mood and learned in time how best to meet each wave of feeling, where to oppose, where to heap endearments, where to talk and throw herself into the subject of the moment, where to listen and make no answer that might fret.

There came a day when a harsh cold fell upon the moors and Robert Elvin rode to bring in some of his ponies. Beyond Ugborough's rocky summit, where its ramparts rose above the grey web of the forest, the waste swept in featureless folds northerly for mile on mile. All was now sombre, iron rusty and black. Sad-coloured garments held the hills and over them a wind from the north-east swept, dry and bitter in the blade. It brought a haze to lessen the austerity of the winter heath, and it made a low whimper, which rose and fell, now brushing the sharper sound of running waters to the ear, now deadening their murmur as it lulled, now increasing to gusts, that woke a tinkle from the dead heather and hummed to a deeper note upon the granite face of some great stone. Where the hills fell to each other's feet, rillets ran winding irregular threads among the boulders; and here was the highest light of these far-flung sobrieties; where, at fall and ripple, flashed grey foam, or spread some still and limpid pool to reflect the ash-coloured sky.

It seemed that winter had uttered an ultimate note, that the vitality of earth was sunk to its lowest, that her heart beat more slowly and her sleep sounded deeper than at any day until now. It was the dark hour before the dawn of another year and inanimate life seemed to have receded beneath the surface of things, while animate life had retreated to the greater comfort of the low lands.

Robert found his ponies, a dozen of them, clustered knee-deep in dead fern on the lee of a tor. They were dejected and showed pleasure at his coming. He sent his dog forward and soon the little cavalcade was trotting off the hills, down through a long and narrow coomb which opened above Owley, two miles to the south.

Then suddenly he came upon his father-in-law sitting as still as the stone under him. It was uplifted by the way in the eye of the harsh wind; yet Jacob reposed indifferent, gazing over the moor, his stick beside him, his hands clasped together. Robert stopped, dismounted and approached.

"Hullo, father! You didn't ought to be up here in this wind," he said and extended his hand. Jacob shook it and apparently proceeded with his thoughts aloud.

"I like to feel my marrow growing cold inside the bones. It teaches you how it'll be at the end, when the last cold comes that no fire can heat again. The crested plovers are all gone from the moor, Bob Elvin. You see them, so wise and dainty are they, running about in the lew fields and round the corn-stacks, like little pixy people. And they lift their kitten cries to keep themselves warm. But when the weather breaks, they'll soon fly back to their haunts again."

"So they will then. Get moving now. Drop in and have a tell with us at Owley and a good cup of tea to warm you. I'm taking my ponies down to the yard for shelter. Thank the Lord we're well to do for hay this year; the cattle can spare them a bite. We've got enough for all."

"I'm troubled for the foxes, however. There's no security in nature, Robert. All hand to mouth; and the rabbits lie so low, and there's not a beetle or a frog moving."

Robert laughed.

"The baggering foxes have picked up one or two of my chickens of late," he said.

"Don't be too hard on them. They're a fine, fearless

people and it's cruel work standing before hounds on an empty belly. No security. Many soft-billed birds are dropping dead out of the trees by night—just for hunger and cold. No mercy shown; none expected. Only a man here and there knows the meaning of mercy. But the creatures have their bit of luck, Robert. Terror of death cannot fret them and sense of wrong can't wound their hearts. Great privileges you see. And how's your fine wife? A better wife than daughter, I hope?"

"Don't say that, father. Our thoughts are often along with you. Avis and me would be terrible glad to comfort you if we could."

"Judith Huxam, my children's grandmother, once said that I should call upon the hills to cover me. She said right. I have. But they refuse. A very respectable thing to worship the Lord, Bob Elvin; only take heed to stop at that. Don't try and follow Him, or do what He tells you, else you'll be locked up, or get into the workhouse. Worship at a distance. There may be better bread than is made of wheat, but human nature can't digest it—can't digest the teaching of Christ. It's no good. The lawyers and the politicians, the traders and the soldiers, and the sailors and even the parsons—such as are honest—they'll all tell you it won't work."

"Come on, father; don't sit here no more. Jump up on my cob and I'll walk beside you."

"I'm going to give Owley to your wife. It was ordained from the first, and my Margery agreed it should be so."

"You have, master. A very grand start in life you've offered us."

"Did my late wife know about it?"

"Yes, Mrs. Bullstone knew all about it."

"Good. I killed her, Bob. If I'd fired a gun into her heart, I couldn't have killed her surer. A pretty awful thing; but have no fear I'm not going to pay for it. When a man commits murder, they ought not to put him away: they ought to keep him alive, as long as ever they

can, and let his sin gnaw into him, like a cancer, inch by inch. All sin's a cancer: it eats the heart, but it leaves the core to go on throbbing, so that the sinner may suffer as long as his flesh and bones hang together."

"Don't you say these fearful things. Come now, else Avis will wonder what's happened to me. There's a lot of good life ahead of you, Mr. Bullstone; and a lot of valuable work to be done—so clever as you are."

"There is—I grant that much. Much work for my fellow-creatures. But you can't accept man till you've denied God, Robert. That's a hard saying for your boy's ears, no doubt. Yet so it is. You can't make man your first thought and his welfare your faith, till you've put God Almighty and all other graven images behind your back."

"Don't you think that; you'll come back to God presently. I'm sure He's waiting for you, father."

Jacob shook his head.

"I don't ask you to do the like," he said. "Let every man trust his God so long as he can, and so far as he can. But be honest, and when your dark day comes and you can't trust any more, then fear not to say so."

Bob remounted his pony, which was beginning to shiver.

"I must get on," he declared. "And I pray you'll come down and drink a dish of tea before you start for home. Do now, father."

Jacob appeared to have forgotten him; but then he turned to him again.

"Small creatures fall light, remember. A grasshopper can drop where a bullock would break his neck. Pity's often wasted on those that don't need it and withheld from such as do. I fell heavy. I'm heavy in body and heavy in mind. I'm smashed up for good and all now; but no pity for me—no pity in Heaven above, or on the earth beneath. And I doubt—I very much doubt, between ourselves, whether I'd take it even if 'twas offered, young fellow."

"You'll find peace—you'll find peace. I'm sure there's a lot are praying for you," murmured Elvin. Then

Jacob rose off the rock, nodded to him and limped off northward.

The gloaming was already coming down.

Robert drove his ponies home, gave them the hospitality of the farmyard and a shake of hay, then went in to his wife.

Tea was ready and his mother, quicker to mark the young man's moods than Avis, asked him presently if anything were amiss.

"Don't tell me the cold have got into you, Bob," she said.

"No, mother," he answered; "but a wisht thing happened. Poor Mr. Bullstone—up over—sitting like a lone hawk on a rock. He wouldn't come for a drop of tea, though I begged him, and he's going mad terrible fast by the look of it."

"He'll kill himself before much longer," declared Avis. "And he'll kill Auna too: she's fretting to fiddlestrings about him. A very good thing if poor father was to die, I reckon. For what's the use of living like him—a scourge to himself and nuisance to everybody else?"

"He's suffered such a lot that it's shaken his mind," answered Bob. "But no doubt, in good hands, he could be coaxed round again. He's not so old as he looks, and he's tremendous strong, else he couldn't face the weather like he does."

"Maybe Huntingdon will calm him. A spot surely to tame man or beast," said the elder Mrs. Elvin; "but yet, on the other hand, it might overthrow all. I'm very sorry for Auna—'tis far too much to put upon a young creature."

"Her father's her life in a manner of speaking," replied Robert. "Where he goes, she'll go. Peter says that Huntingdon would be a good thing very likely, for Mr. Bullstone hinders more than he helps now. He's getting a bit jealous of Peter—so Peter thinks."

"Not him," answered Avis. "That's only Peter's vanity."

"What does your grandfather say about it?" asked the mother-in-law of Avis.

"He haven't had much time to think about my father, because grandmother was so queer for a bit when mother died. But she's pretty right again now, and they're soon moving into the villa, and grandfather's terrible busy. By the same token I must go down to-morrow and help Aunt Jane. I've promised to take the children off her hands for a few hours. A great upheaval."

"So it is then. A very strange thought—the post-office and the shop without Mrs. Huxam in it; but it's time they retired and the name will be carried on."

Avis considered.

"For how long I wonder. Uncle Jeremy's got it all at his finger ends—so he says, but John Henry vows he'll never stick to it."

Her mother-in-law brought the subject back to Jacob.

"I hope Barlow Huxam will consider about your father in a Christian spirit," she said. "Something should be done for Mr. Bullstone, and I wouldn't say but what you and John Henry oughtn't to try and get a doctor to him."

"He'd never see nobody, and he's turned against us," declared Avis. "He's fairly friendly to grandfather I believe, but not to grandmother. He never did like her, because she saw he was not a godly man, and she kept mother away from him when the devil tempted poor mother to try and go back. He's the fifth wheel of a coach now—father is. A know-nought, rash man always, and it's no unkindness to wish he was out of his sufferings I'm sure. He's a disgrace to us all in a manner of speaking, mother."

The elder woman considered and shook her head.

"That's a hard word," she answered.

"He ended mother's days whether or no," argued Avis. "And mother was always a thousand times more to us than father. And you can't expect us—especially me with my honeymoon spoiled—to feel overmuch for him."

"Auna was always the one for your father," said Mrs. Elvin. "It was the same from the beginning."

"Because she was so like mother," answered Avis. "Mother must have been the daps of Auna, when she was young. But why Auna always clung to father and put him before everybody, none of us ever did know. Grandmother's done with her, because she's a liar."

"They are too different in their natures to get on very well I expect," said Robert. "Come out and look at the ponies afore it's dark, Avis."

They were still lovers and only happy in each other's company.

CHAPTER III

THE PILGRIM FATHERS

NONE could explain the malady that overtook Judith Huxam after the death of her daughter. The termination of Margery's life did not appear to be the cause, for Judith shed no tears on man or woman who, as she described it, had "died in Christ." Her child was safe, and the febrile disorder that upset Mrs. Huxam on returning home arose from other causes. All, save Barlow himself, supposed that she was very naturally shocked into sickness by the events reported from the Barbican. How she had taken Margery to her brother's, that she might pass in peace; how Bullstone had discovered the hiding-place and thrust in upon it; how he had actually arrived but a few moments after his wife's death; and how Judith's struggle against the violence of the men had caused her to faint in Barlow's arms—these things were known, and none of her own circle but applauded Mrs. Huxam, rejoiced that she had achieved her high purpose, and felt that such a victory was more than sufficient to explain her subsequent collapse.

One, however, understood it differently, and that was Mr. Huxam. He believed that the cause of Judith's tribulation rested with himself. Indeed, as time passed and his wife gradually returned to physical strength and her accustomed health of mind and body, Barlow perceived that he had done a thing which would modify Judith's attitude to him for ever.

That at least became clear—a picture indelibly printed on the combined surface of their lives when the storm had

passed, their daughter was in her grave and the tumultuous moments of her death a memory. Slowly Huxam understood that henceforth his wife would not regard him as of old. That he should have assisted Jacob to find her was, it appeared, a lapse that could never leave future relations unmarked, and when again he saw her brother, Lawrence Pulleyblank, who had also won Judith's displeasure, the old fisherman doubted not that Barlow's action, together with the united operation of the three men in breaking down the door, had for ever darkened Judith's opinion of them both. Lawrence trusted that, with time, his sister would see their deed was natural, in the light of her silence when they challenged; but Barlow knew better.

The estrangement fell awkwardly, for now came the great change in the life of the Huxams. The bustle and business consequent on leaving the post-office for their new home offered a respite, but all was soon accomplished and presently the husband and wife found themselves thrown together after a fashion unfamiliar since their earliest married days. Only when their retirement had been completed did they gradually come to perceive all that it implied, and the dislocation of their lives, that resulted from thus dropping the habits of half a century. The change completed Judith's cure and restored her vitality and energy; but one aspect of the new existence they had not paused to consider, and now it was forced upon them. Neither had been concerned with their future occupations save vaguely; but such plans as they had formed proved wholly unequal to filling the startling and immense spaces of leisure now thrust into their lives. Barlow had imagined himself gardening with Margery, and thus ordering his time and energies; he designed, too, some weekly hours at the shop, that he might assist Jane and his son and launch them into the details of the business. For the rest he had not planned anything; while Judith hoped that her new existence would offer more leisure for reading desirable books and aiding her neighbours. They came thus

into a world of new experience; and when all was done, the house arranged in every detail to Mrs. Huxam's liking, the new garden at a stage when nature's more leisurely processes succeeded Barlow's zeal, they found themselves faced with a generous gift of time and some difficulty to fill the lengthening days.

It was then that the cloud he had hoped to dispel settled into a permanent canopy and Barlow found that his wife was changed. In no actual relation could he declare any alteration, but the former, mental understanding had failed. She did not trust him as of old and her outlook on life had taken a new colour also. It was tinged with melancholy. Grey and austere it had always been, but not downcast as now. He almost fancied sometimes that the note of triumphant assurance had left her voice. The change influenced him a great deal, and on an occasion when he was at the shop with his daughter-in-law he uttered an alarm. They were good friends and Jane was old enough to understand some of his difficulties.

"It's fear for my future that's at the bottom of all this," Barlow told his son's wife. "People think that Mrs. Huxam is a bit under the weather, because of the great change into our villa residence; but a thing like that is of no account to her. She's troubling about me—that's the anxiety. When I took Jacob Bullstone to his dying wife, I did a thing that your mother-in-law felt to be above measure wrongful. She may be right and, if I thought she was, I should confess as much; but I can honestly look back and feel it wasn't a wrong thing. The sufferings of that man were real; and I was rent myself to know that Margery was going home; and between my own grief and his, what more natural that I should take him to say his last farewell? He was an evil man and he'd done fearful wrong, but one thing I never will allow—that he could by word, or touch, have cost Margery her salvation. Far more likely a word, or touch, from her might have saved him. And so I took the man; but the shocking upshot, Jane—

the shocking upshot is that my dear wife no longer feels sure whether I haven't doomed myself for all eternity by that deed!"

Jane begged him to banish any such painful suspicion.

"I'm sure it's at the very foundation of things that you're saved, just as much as she is," said his daughter-in-law. "There's some great truths we take for granted, and that's one of 'em. If I was you, I'd have it out with her."

"A woman like my wife, who lives, you may say, with one foot in the other world, will sometimes find the heavenly light to dazzle her, if you catch my meaning, Jane," said Mr. Huxam. "With her standards of conduct and her face always lifted to the divine perfection, she may well perhaps lose the sense of proportion and forget that if we was all perfect, there wouldn't be any need for us to be saved. She probably don't allow enough for the power of Jesus Christ to fetch in His lost sheep."

Barlow raised the question again on the following Sunday, when Mrs. Huxam, during the stagnation between dinner and tea, had permitted herself an hour with a book. It was a work that Lawrence Pulleyblank had discovered at a second-hand bookseller's shop in Plymouth. For he was a strenuous reader himself, within limited boundaries, and this work, entitled "The Sabbath of New England," had given him infinite satisfaction. He had sent it to Judith as a peace-offering in some sort.

Mrs. Huxam now learned what a Sabbath might be, and had actually once been, as ordered by the Pilgrim Fathers—they who sailed from Mr. Pulleyblank's own Barbican in times past. She had seen the white stone which recorded their departure, and now she pursued the book and marked the many passages her brother's black lead pencil had underlined.

Pain and pleasure accompanied the perusal. If England chastised sin with whips, it appeared that these New Englanders had wielded scorpions for their ungodly. The de-

tails of their rule braced Mrs. Huxam's spirit, while it drooped a little when she reflected that such discipline was lost to the world for ever.

She read the Blue Laws of Connecticut and other literary survivals. She considered the penances and penalties inflicted on those who broke the Lord's Day, and found therein a code of perfection beyond even her own dreams. She learned how the law drove all to worship and locked the doors upon them until the exercise was ended; how Tabitha Morgan was fined three shillings and sixpence for playing on the Lord's Day, and Deborah Banks—a deeper sinner—paid five shillings for a like offence; how Jonah and Susan Smith were seen to smile and suffered accordingly; how Lewis and Sarah Chapman—sweethearts—were found in goodman Chapman's garden sitting under an apple tree—branch of ill omen—and fined for their levity; how Elizabeth Eddy was seen to hang out clothes upon the Sabbath Day and mulcted ten shillings for her lapse.

Mrs. Huxam contemplated such a Sunday with enthusiasm and the printed page brought a rare flush to her cheek. But worse followed and her brother had doubly scored the fall of mariners, which too often happened. There was Captain Kemble, of Boston, newly come off a three years' voyage, who publicly kissed his wife, the day being Sunday; and devout persons were compelled to witness the offence, since it took place under the open sky on the erring man's front-door step. Another master of a Boston vessel, caught loitering in the streets, during those later hours of Saturday sanctified by law to "catechising and preparations for the Sabbath," was followed by a constable and dragged to prison. But in his case divine retribution delayed not and the little child of this sailor fell into a well on the following day and was drowned; whereupon the contrite wretch acknowledged the Hand of God and the justice of his punishment in open congregation.

These were they who had fled from England to escape religious persecution.

It was at this stage of her enquiry that Mr. Huxam joined his wife in the parlour of their villa residence, and she took off her spectacles to utter an aspiration.

"Oh, for the grand old days and the grand old faith!" she sighed, and he, who had already dipped into "The Sabbath of New England," assured her that while such as she still stood for the Light, some fine breath and after flavour of those adamant times yet breathed its essence over the earth, to be caught up and preserved and passed forward by the will of the Everlasting.

"While the Chosen Few remain, the work goes on," he said.

"I'm not repining," she answered. "I'm not even wishing I'd lived among those grand people, because that would be to want what my Saviour didn't will; but the flesh is weak, and reading of such high Christianity makes one mourn for the present day."

"You open the road to a thought a good bit on my nerves of late—ever since our Margery went home," he told her. "The better the day, the better the deed, so I'll openly tell you that I'm much fearing, Judith, you don't hold me quite so high as you were used to do."

His wife looked at him and set down her Sunday reading. She did not answer and he continued.

"Of course I know the reason; but I'm a long way short of being convinced that you are right. You hold it was a shameful abuse of confidence and deliberate danger to Margery that I should have let her husband have the chance to see her alive; and you think that action has put me in a very doubtful position. Well, I disagree, Judy."

"I know you do, so what's the good of talking about it? I'm not your judge, Barlow. I feel sometimes that—I feel, in fact, nobody can be positive. You'll call that a weak word coming from me; but I've been a bit bruised and battered by the powers of evil myself of late."

"Never!" exclaimed Mr. Huxam. "Are you sure what you are saying?"

She looked away with strained eyes, as though surveying the tempestuous places of her own soul.

"Nobody so strong but they may yet fall," she said. "Another of the devil's tricks I've found of late—they're endless, and 'tis a pity some godly man, with the power of the pen, can't make a list of those dark wiles and set 'em down for our guidance and warning."

"He won't waste his time with you, I reckon," answered Mr. Huxam. "The devil knows when he's down and out—none quicker."

"A cunning plot—to let a person go for years and years building up for righteousness, until they feel strong in the Lord and in the power of His might; and then, like a thief, to come some fine day, when least expected, and strike with all his strength! Years he'll let you go, for he knows the people who are proof against the common trick of his trade; years he'll pass by, till a godly creature takes heart and believes the world, the flesh and the devil are all left behind; but no—he's never left behind!"

"It he's struck at you, he's only had his trouble for his pains," vowed Barlow.

"Easy to say. But I want more Light. I'm groping a bit just now. The Lord sends fears and terrors."

"You do amaze me," he answered, "and I hope this will be a lesson to you and me to cleave closer in heart than of late we have done. First our dear child's death under terrible circumstances, and then this hugeous upheaval have thrown us apart; but I'm glad you've spoke and done me the compliment to tell me you're not so content as usual. That must be mended, because if you were to feel a grain of doubt about things, then the linch-pin's out of the wheel and the roof-tree of the house is broken. So I hope you'll begin by getting quite right with yourself, for all our sakes, Judy."

"Can a human creature be too zealous for God?" asked she. "That's the question I put to myself, and three months ago I'd have been in no doubt of the answer."

"There is no doubt," he replied, "and if you feel a doubt, that is only to say you're not well again yet. You want a dose of strong medicine. Not medicine for the soul, I don't mean, but medicine for the body. I've often known a liver pill to bring me a good step nearer God, because it's His Almighty plan that soul and body be very close cogged together, so long as they bide on one earth. And clean and healthy organs help the higher parts. You see Mr. Briggs again, and then, after you've took a good dollop of his cauteries, I'll promise you won't feel any more doubts. Conscience depends more on the bowels than we've any idea. None can be too zealous for God; and none can be zealous enough for that matter. I've noticed a dull look about your eyes ever since we come into our own, and I've seen the same expression on my own face; and I'll tell you what it is, Judy. It's weariness, because we ain't weary. Not to feel tired when you go to bed argues something wrong. In a word you can't work for fifty years and then suddenly become a lady and gentleman in a villa residence and not suffer pretty sharp. In my case, it takes the shape of indigestion and sleeplessness; in yours, being a soulful creature before all else, you get in the fidgets about religion."

She considered this.

"I could greatly wish you were right," she said, exhibiting a mild and almost pensive mood which was foreign to her. "I've had my suspicions once and again. It's dangerous, even for a woman of my age to sit with her hands in her lap, and know that if she rings a bell, another will come to wait upon her."

"You've been ill and had to be waited upon; besides we figured it all out: we knew that our new life would embrace rest and time for our innocent happiness."

"We must be sleepless in well-doing, however, or else we may go down."

"Our life seems to be emptied out, I grant that," he answered. "There's not so much to it as there was, and

light things—like gardening and reading books and so on—can't fill the gap."

"No," she said. "Where there's a hole in your life, the first person ready and willing to fill it is the devil. You talk about 'innocent happiness,' and yet all experience goes to show that happiness is doubtfully innocent at best. I've never felt too sure that God put the longing for happiness in us. Security's better than happiness. In fact there's no happiness, rightly so called, without it. And that thought is making me suffer a good deal. And physie's no use against fear."

Mr. Huxam scratched his head.

"I don't much like what you're saying," he replied. "If I thought the villa residence was coming between us and the work of the Holy Ghost——"

He regarded the prospect blankly and Judith made no effort to dull its gloomy proportions.

"Come and drink tea," he said. "We know where to trust, and it's no good getting our tails down at our age. We've faced life and its many bitters up till now, and it would be a fantastical come-along-of-it if we failed under the reward of well-doing. Who sent this house, tell me that?"

"God," admitted Mrs. Huxam. "And why did He send it? We don't know yet. We pray Him not to lead us into temptation; but we well know it's a part of His discipline so to do."

"We'll look out, never fear," replied Barlow. "But we'll look out in a large spirit, Judy. We mustn't think this commodious home is a trap to make us forget our heavenly home. 'Twould be to look a gift horse in the mouth, my dear—a very ill-convenient thing against God or man."

CHAPTER IV

EVENING STAR

ONLY fitfully did Jacob Bullstone accept his situation. He was occasionally resigned and spoke with rational appreciation of facts; but often it seemed that his mind still stood at a point in time before his wife had passed. The actual loss he appeared to forget upon days of stress. Such moments, however, occurred less frequently than at first. Auna never resisted his proposals now, or attempted to prevent the long days alone that he was constantly planning. For she found that her father returned the better and the saner from these days. Words that man was powerless to speak, he heard from the solitudes. The hills had not covered, but they had comforted him. As the spring waxed, he increased the number of these expeditions and separated himself for longer intervals from his kind. He watched the lengthened evenings sink to sunset and the dawns open cold and sweet before the sun. He declared that Time was a being, and tried to explain to Auna that Time wearied at night-fall, slept by night and woke again invigorated with the dawn.

She humoured his imaginings and was always thankful when any subject outside himself could arrest his thoughts. But that was seldom. He suffered evil days and, when they came, Auna devoted herself to him and let all lesser duties mind themselves.

There came over Bullstone a long period of fruitless rage. Having for a season heaped contumely upon his own head and wondered why the people did not rise up and stone him; having subsequently mourned and become very

silent through the passage of four weeks, his unsteady mind broke into a frenzy and his self-restraint failed, so that Auna shook in fear and Peter began to tell the people that his father was mad. But after a calenture, during which he cursed fate, flouted heaven, and uttered many profanities, which terrified Auna and pleased George Middleweek, Jacob grew calmer again and was almost childish for a season. He became more mild and humble, less envenomed against destiny.

People were sorry for Auna and Peter, but there seemed to be few to help them. Adam Winter, however, kept in touch with them, and William Marydrew often came to Red House on one pretext or another. He had declared from the first that Jacob would recover, so far as his brain was concerned. He knew Bullstone best and had the art to calm him quicker than any other man was able to do. For Jacob felt William to be trustworthy and loyal. He often went to see him, and if any idea suddenly struck into the sufferer's thoughts, he would either convey it to William, or describe it to Auna. At this season his egotism was supreme and only at rare moments was he able to dismiss his projects, or himself, from the substance of speech.

A trivial thought took Jacob one day as he stood among his dogs, and he turned his back upon them, left Red House and, following the river, soon reached Mr. Marydrew's cottage.

"It's borne in on me that there are three sorts of men and only three, William," he said, standing before the ancient and looking down at him, where he sat smoking his pipe in his porch.

"A very simple earth if there was only three sorts of men on it, Jacob."

"Three sorts—those that leave the world better than they found it; those that leave it worse; and those that go through it like shadows and make no more mark than shadows do. And I thought, in my pride, I was the first sort of man, and never guessed to be the second."

He sat down on the bench beside William.

"We most of us leave the world better than we found it by a few kind actions and decent thoughts," declared Billy. "Very few go through life without doing their fellow-creatures a good turn here and there. Certainly you've done a lot of good in your time and many can testify to it. And to say you've done evil also—that's only to say you're a human."

"At best the good balances the evil and leaves us only shadows, with nothing to credit."

"Nonsense," answered Billy. "We know—even us small people—that we're of more account than shadows."

"In my case the great evil swallowed the little good. I wish I had never been born, because then none could point to my grave some day and say, 'There lies the man that killed his wife.' If I could have chose before I was born, I'd have said to God, 'Either let me come into the world for well-doing, or not at all,' and that would have been a decent, self-respecting wish. But how can people believe in God's mercy and love, when the world swarms with bad men He could as easily have made good ones? Take my late wife, for you must firmly grasp now that Margery's dead—that rare woman is dead, William. Take her and ask yourself how an all-seeing, all-loving God could let that innocent, harmless creature love a man who would end by killing her?"

"You waste a lot of time, Jacob," said the other, "and you ax a lot of questions no mortal man can ever answer, because we don't know enough. I've lived to see great changes myself, and you may say, well inside civility, that God's like some of us old men, who were once young. When I was young I was well thought of and held in great respect, and I counted, in my small way, among the rest. And when God was a thought younger—for time will go on and He can't be outside it, Jacob—when He was a thought younger, the people held Him in greater respect than now. He ain't quite so much in the middle of

the picture as He was when I was a boy—just as I myself ain't no more in the middle of my own picture. But God's just the same as He always was, and just so determined as ever not to give a plain answer to a plain question. He never have done it and He never will, because it's contrary to His Almighty opinion of what's best for us."

"And how if it's all a mare's-nest and there's no God, William?"

"Then 'tis waste of time to be rude to Him. Civility costs nought anyway. My old father said to me when I was a child, 'Always touch your hat to a pair of hosses, William, for you never know who's behind 'em.'"

"I puzzle a good deal upon the subject, and life often flings it uppermost," answered Bullstone. "In fact so are we built, through education of conscience, that it's impossible to go very far without being brought up against God. How often in my secret times of pain do I catch the Name on my tongue? How often do I say 'My God, my God, what have I done?' I ask Him that question by night and day. A silly question, too, for I know what I've done as well as God can. But I know what I've suffered far better than He can. I went on hoping and hoping, as you bade me, last year. I went hoping, with one eye on God, like a rat that creeps out of his hole with one eye on the dog hard by. But the game had to be played out by inches. He knew that Margery was dying, a few miles away, and He kept it secret from me and didn't let me hear till it was too late. He planned it, so that I should just be there after the very last breath was breathed, should touch her before she was cold, should miss her by seconds. And she longing—longing to come back to me—to save me. What should we call that if a man had done it—eh, William?"

"Come and look at my bees, Jacob. A brave swarm yesterday, and poor Sammy Winter took 'em for me with all the cleverness of a sane man."

"Mysteries everywhere. People pity Samuel. I don't—not now. I did once, because it's the fashion to think

anybody's lacking reason is a sad sight. Why? Brains are like money—poison so often as not. My brains have poisoned me—fretted and festered and burnt out my soul like an acid. The more I see of the wild, innocent creatures, the more I feel that reason's not all we think it, William. You can't fetter the soul down to reason. What has reason done for me? The little comfort I get now is outside reason. Reason only goads me into wanting to end it and make away with myself. That would be the reasonable thing. What happened yesterday? Auna found a rhyme book that belonged to my wife. And in that book was a sprig of white heath I picked for her on a wonderful day we had, just after she had promised to marry me. There it was faded to brown—more than twenty years old. And what else did Auna find? Between the pages she found the crumbs of a little sweet biscuit—a sort of a little biscuit, William, that Margery loved. Where's the reason when a crumb of wheat can stab the soul deeper than a sword? And what then? What did Auna say? 'Nothing in reason, God knows. 'Father,' she said, 'you and me will eat these crumbs—then we'll have shared the biscuit with dear mother.' A holy sacrament—yes, faith—'holy's' not too strong a word. We ate the crumbs, and there was a strange, mad comfort in it; and the child smiled and it made her happier too. You could see it in her face. Why? Why? All darkness—no answer. And the little verse book, with the heather bloom, will be in my breast pocket now till I die—never out of reach of my hand—warmed daily by my warmth. Why? Can reason tell me? No—it's only because I'm gone below reason, William."

"Or it might be above it, my son."

"Such things make your head whirl. If there's to be happiness in heaven, we mustn't be built like we are here. Fear must be left out of us and the power of remembering. We must be suffered to forget earth, William; yet, what would that make of heaven? Nothing. It all tumbles

to pieces whichever way you think of it, for reason, whether it is a good or evil thing, makes heaven a wilderness."

"Don't you fret your wits with such stuff, for it won't help you to patience or wisdom."

"No, it won't bring the dead to life, or lift the brand from me. But I thresh it out by night and see great things heave up in my mind. Then, when I jump to put them into words, they fade and I lose them. Reason may be the work of the devil—his master-stroke to turn us from salvation. You can't be damned without it; but you can be saved without it. Or would you say a man can't have a soul to be saved, until he is a reasonable creature, built to separate good from evil and choose the right? No doubt it's well understood by deep men. My mind turns in and feeds on itself, William, because there's nothing left outside to feed on."

"You must come back to your appointed task. You must keep doing good things. You must do more and think less."

"I'm going up to Huntingdon with Auna this afternoon."

"And let her talk to you. Don't think her words are worthless. You've got a nice bit of your wife left in Auna. Always remember that."

"I do. I shall live on for Auna. There's one beautiful thing left for me—beautiful, and yet a living wound, that grows painfuller every day I live. And that's Auna—Auna growing more and more and more like Margery—bringing her back, even to the toss of her head and the twinkle of her eye. She laughs like her mother, William; she cries like her mother; she thinks like her mother. So my only good will be my first grief. The things still left to care about will torture me more than all the hate of the world can torture me. They'll keep memory awake—stinging, burning, till I scream to Auna to get out of my sight presently, and leave me with the foxes and the carrion crows."

Then Bullstone limped away. He soon grew calmer, as

he was wont to do when alone with nobody to whet his thoughts upon.

During the later part of this day he ascended the moors with Auna and walked to the empty Warren House. They talked of those who had dwelt there, for that morning a letter had come from Mrs. Veale for Margery, giving her news of the Veale family—Benny and the children.

“You must answer it, Auna, and tell the woman that your mother passed away last winter,” said Jacob. “If I was a younger man, I might go out to Canada myself and take you with me; but we’ll stop here. You’ll like Huntingdon, won’t you?”

“Yes, father.”

“Your mother’s dead,” he told her; “but we shan’t be without a lot of treasures to remind us of her.”

“All the things she specially cared about you’ll have round you, father.”

“I know them all,” he answered, “because, so long as I felt hope that she might come back, I was specially careful for them and set them aside out of harm’s way. She had a great liking for little things that she coupled with the thoughts of friends.”

He spoke the truth, for many trifles that had sustained some faint fragrance of hope while Margery lived—trifles that her heart had valued and her hands had held—were now subject to a different reverence, set apart and sanctified for ever.

“We might take a few of her favourite flowers too,” suggested Auna, “but I doubt they would live up there in winter. You can always come down and see them at the right time, father.”

“Everything shall be just as you will, Auna. You’ll be mistress and I’ll be man.”

She laughed and they tramped forward. Jacob could now walk all day without suffering for it, but he was lame and his pace slower than of old.

He brought the key with him and opened the silent house.

A week rarely passed without a visit, and Jacob always awoke to animation and interest when he came. The melancholy spot and mean chambers, though they had chilled not a few human hearts in the past, always cheered him. To a dwelling whence others had thankfully departed for the last time, he now looked forward with satisfaction; and Auna, seeing that only here came any peace to her father, welcomed Huntingdon already as her future home. Not a shadow clouded her eyes as she regarded it, and not one regret before the receding vision of Red House and her own life therein. For her father was her world, as he had always been, and when he turned against his home, she echoed him and loved Red House no more. She knew that for Jacob the death of her mother had destroyed Red House; she understood that he desired to begin again and she felt well content to begin again with him. His influence had come between her and normal development in certain directions. She was old for her age, but also young. No instinct of sex had intruded upon her life, and little interest in any being outside her own home circle. Even within it her sister and brothers were nothing compared to her father, and impulses, fears, suspicions that might have chilled a girl's forward glance under the walls of forlorn Huntingdon, never rose in Auna's mind to darken the future. Her father willed there to dwell and her welfare and happiness as yet took no flight beyond him.

They wandered through the stone-paved kitchen and climbed to the little chambers above, while for the twentieth time, Jacob planned how things should be.

"I'll have this room," he said, "because the sun sets upon it; and you will bide here, Auna, because it's fitting the sun shall rise where you wake."

She was happy when he spoke thus tenderly sometimes.

"My sun set, when mother died," continued Jacob. "What's left is twilight; but you'll be the evening star, Auna, as it says in mother's little book. You can read it if you want to. I'll let it touch no other hand but

yours. I've read every word many times, because I know her eyes rested on every word once."

"I'm afraid I don't understand about poetry, father."

"You'll come to understand it when you're older, perhaps. She understood it and got pleasure from it."

The desolation of the warren house soothed Jacob, and having wandered through it he sat for a time outside the enclosures before starting to return home. He rolled his melancholy eyes over the great spaces to a free horizon of the hills folding in upon each other.

"Will time speed swifter here, Auna?"

"I hope it will, father," she answered, "but the days will be very like each other."

"Days too like each other drag," he told her. "We must change the pattern of the days. It shan't be all work for you. We'll do no work sometimes, and now and then you'll go for a holiday down to the 'in country,' and I shall be alone till you come back."

"I'm never going to leave you alone," she said. "If you think upon a holiday for me, you've got to come too, or have Peter up here for a bit."

"There's only one other thing beside the moor that's good to me; and that's the sea; and you well love to be on the sea, so we might go to it now and again."

Auna's eyes sparkled.

"I'd like that dearly," she told him.

"To know the sea better may be a wise deed for me," he said. "Some it hurts and cannot comfort—so I've heard. Not that it could ever be a friend to me, like the hills."

"You'd love it better and better, specially if you'd sail out on to it, same as I did with Uncle Lawrence."

Her father nodded and this allusion did not banish his placid mood. The sun rays were growing slant and rich as they set out for home. Auna laughed at their shadows flung hugely before them. Then they descended and she walked silently for a long way with her hand in her father's hand. But she was content despite

their silence, for she knew that his mind had passed into a little peace. She often wondered why the desert solitudes cheered him, for they cast her down. She liked to leave it behind her—that great, lonely thing—and descend into the kindly arms of the Red House trees and the welcome of the river. For the river itself, in Auna's ear, sang a different song beside her home, than aloft, in its white nakedness, and loneliness. There it was elfin and cold and silvery, but it did not seem to sing for her; while beneath, at the feet of the pines, under the bridge of logs, in the pools and stickles she knew to the last mossy boulder—there her name river had music for her alone and she understood it. It was a dear friend who would never pass away out of her life, or die and leave her to mourn. A time was coming when she would know it better still, see it aloft nigh its cradle, learn its other voices, that yet were strange to her. In the valley the river was old and wise; perhaps aloft, where it ran nigh Huntingdon, it was not so wise or tender, but younger and more joyous.

“It'll have to be my friend,” thought Auna, “for there won't be no others up there but father.”

An incident clouded the return journey, and though neither Jacob nor his daughter was sentimental, death confronted them and made them sorry. An old goat, one of the parents of the Red House flock, had disappeared during the previous winter, and they had fancied that he must have fallen into the stream and been swept away in a freshet that happened when he vanished. But now, in a little green hollow rimmed with heath and granite, they found all that was left of the creature—wisps of iron-grey hair, horns attached to his skull, a few scattered bones picked clean by the carrion crows and the hollow skeleton of his ribs with young grasses sprouting through it.

“Oh, father—it's ‘Beardy,’ ” whispered Auna.

“So it is then. And I'm glad we found him. A very dignified thing, the way the creatures, when they know they're going to die, leave their friends and go away all

alone. A fine thing in them; and there's many humans would do the same if they had the strength I dare say."

Auna descended among the bones and picked up "Beardy's" horns.

"Peter will like to have them for a decoration," she said. "I hope he didn't suffer much, poor old dear."

"Not much, I expect."

"And I hope the carrion crows didn't dare to touch him till he was gone, father."

"No, no. There's unwritten laws among the wild things. I expect they waited."

"Did his wives miss him, should you think?"

"We don't know. They can't tell us. Perhaps they wondered a bit. More likely they knew he'd gone up to die and wouldn't come back. They know deeper than we think they know among themselves, Auna."

"I've often been sorry for that poor Scape-goat in the Bible, father. I read about him to grandmother long ago, one Sunday, and never forgot him."

"And so have I been sorry for him, too."

They tramped on together and presently Jacob spoke. He was thinking still of her last speech and his mind had turned dark.

"The Scape-goat in the wilderness was a happy beast compared to me," he said suddenly. "He went to his doom a clean thing—a harmless creature, pure as Christ's self under his filthy load of human sins. For a foul burden doesn't make the carrier foul. He'd done no wrong and wondered, perhaps, in his brute mind, why the scarlet thread was tied upon him and he was driven into the unkind desert, far from his bite of green grass and the shadow to guard him against the burning sun. But I'm different. I'm a goat caked and rotted with my own sins. The sins of the world are white and light against mine."

"I won't hear you say things like that, father. I won't live with you if you say things like that."

"Bear with me, bear with me. It comes in great waves,

and I'm a drowning man till they roll over and pass. You'll sweeten me presently. Who could live with you and not grow sweeter, you innocent?"

He broke off.

Venus throbbed upon the golden green of the west, and as they descended, the valley was already draped with a thin veil of mist under which the river purred. From the kennels came yapping of the dogs; and when they reached home and entered the yard, half a dozen red terriers leapt round Auna and nosed with excitement at "Beardy's" horns.

CHAPTER V

THE AUTUMN WIND

ON a rough day of autumn, when the river ran high and leaves already flew upon half a gale of wind, a little crowd of men gathered up the valley beyond Red House, and with crow-bars and picks sought to lift up the block of granite whereon aforetime Margery Bullstone so often sat. Jacob had long ago dug down to the foundation, that he might satisfy himself to its size; and it had proved too great beneath the soil, where twice the bulk of the visible part was bedded. Now, therefore, having heaved it from the ground, they were busy to drive four holes in it, where the cleft must take place. Then they inserted four cartridges, set the slow match, lighted it and retreated beside a cart that already stood out of harm's reach.

There had come Peter and Auna, Adam and Samuel Winter and Jacob Bullstone; and Adam had lent his pig-cart to convey the stone to the churchyard.

They watched silently; then came a flash, a puff of white smoke, whirled instantly away on the wind, and a dull explosion that reverberated from the hill above. The great stone was sundered and they returned to it, bringing the horse and cart with them.

The block had split true and a mass accordant with its memorial purpose was presently started upon the way. Jacob directed great care, and helped to lift the stone, that none of the native moss in its scooped crown should be injured.

"Whether it will live down in the churchvard air I

don't know," he said, "but the grave lies in shade most times and we can water it."

Samuel was regarding the boulder with a puzzled face.

"Where be her name going?" he asked.

"The name goes on the side, Sammy," explained Jacob. "Blake, the stone-cutter, was up over a bit ago and took my meaning."

They went slowly away under the rioting wind, and near Red House Peter and his sister left them, while at Shipley Bridge Samuel also returned home.

Jacob walked beside Adam at the horse's head. It was a bad day with him and the passion of the weather had found an echo in his spirit. The rain began to fall and Winter drew a sack from the cart and swung it over his shoulders.

"You'd best to run into Billy Marydrew's till the scat's passed, else you'll get wet," he said.

But the other heeded not the rain.

"A pity it isn't my coffin instead of her stone you've got here," he said. "I'm very wishful to creep beside her. No harm in that—eh?"

"There's every harm in wishing to be dead afore your time, Jacob; but none I reckon in sharing her grave when the day's work is ended."

"Truth's truth and time can't hide truth, whatever else it hides. I killed her, Adam. I killed her as stone-dead as if I'd taken down my gun and shot her."

"No, no, Bullstone, you mustn't say anything like that. You well know it's wrong. In one way we all help to kill our fellow-creatures I reckon; and they help to kill us. 'Tis a mystery of nature. We wear away at each other, like the stone on the sea-shore; we be thrown to grind and drive at each other, not for evil intent, but because we can't help it. We don't know what we're doing, or who we're hurting half our time—no more than frightened sheep jumping on each other's backs, for fear of the dog behind them."

"That's all wind in the trees to me. I wasn't blind: I knew what I was doing. I don't forget how I hurt you neither, and took good years off your life."

"Leave it—leave it and work. Think twice before you give up work and go to Huntingdon."

"My work's done, and badly done. Don't you tell me not to get away to peace if I'm to live."

"Peace, for the likes of us, without learning, only offers through work."

They had reached Marydrew's and Adam made the other go in.

"I'll stop under the lew of the hedge till this storm's over," he said. "Tell Billy I'd like to see him to-night if he can drop in. The wind's turning a thought north and will go down with the sun no doubt."

He went forward, where a deep bank broke the weather, and Jacob entered William's cottage. Mr. Marydrew had seen them from the window and now came to the door.

"A proper tantara 'tis blowing to-day," he said. "My loose slates be chattering, like a woman's tongue, and I'm feared of my life they'll be blowed off. The stone's started then? That's good."

Jacob, according to his habit, pursued his own thoughts and spoke on, as though Adam still stood beside him.

"To talk of peace—to say there's any peace for a red-handed man. Peace is the reward of work and good living and faithful service. Red hands can't earn peace."

"Now don't you begin that noise. Let the wind blow if it must. No call for you to blow. Take my tarpaulin coat for the journey. A thought small, but it will keep your niddick dry."

"Give me a dram," said Jacob, "and listen to me."

Mr. Marydrew brought his spirit from a cupboard while the other rambled on.

"We've just hacked the stone for her grave out of the earth. Torn up by the roots, like she was herself. She dies and her children lose a father as well as a mother, be-

cause they know the stroke was mine; and what honest child shall love a father that killed a mother? That's not all. Think of that man now helping me to get the stone to her grave. Think of the suffering poured on Winter's head. A very good, steadfast sort of man—and yet my hand robbed him of much he can never have again. Three out of four children lost, and that saint underground. And all allowed by the good-will of a watchful God."

He nodded, emptied the glass his friend offered him and looked out at the rain.

"You're dark to-day and don't see very clear, my dear," said Billy. "You put this from your own point of view, and so 'tis very ugly I grant; but every thing that haps has two sides. You've bitched up your show here, Jacob, and I'm not going to pretend you have not. You've done and you've suffered a lot, along of your bad judgment; and you was kindiddled into this affair by the powers of darkness. But 'tis the way of God to use men as sign-posts for their fellow-men. He sees the end of the road from the beginning, and He knows that the next scene of your life, when you meet Margery, will belike be full of joy and gladness."

"It's your heart, not your head, that speaks that trash, William," answered the younger. "Can future joy and gladness undo the past? Can the sunshine bring to life what the lightning killed an hour afore? How shall understanding in Heaven blot out the happenings on earth? Things—awful things—that God's self can't undo? And answer me this: if some live happy in this world and go happy to the next, as well we know some do; then why should not all? If some are born to live with their minds clear, their tempers pure, their passions under control, why should such as I am blot the earth? Would a man make maimed things? Would a decent man bring living creatures to the birth short of legs or eyes, when he could fashion them perfect? Where's the boasted mercy of your God, William? Where's His eternal plan, and what's the

sense of talking about a happy eternity if a man comes to it poisoned by time? I'm calm, you see—a reasoning creature and honest with myself. My everlasting inheritance would be nothing but one undying shame and torture at the ruin I have made; and I know that I cannot stand up in the next world among those I have spoiled and wronged and feel a right to do so. And if my Creator has built me to gnaw my heart out in agony through a life without end—what is He? No, the only poor mercy left for me is eternal night—endless sleep is what I'd pray for if I could pray; because another life must be hell wherever it is spent. Let Him that made us unmake us. 'Tis the least and best that He can do for nine men out of ten."

The storm had swept past and a weather gleam flashed upon the rain. The red beech trees before William's home shone fiery through the falling drops and shook off little, flying flakes of flame, as the leaves whirled in the wind.

Mr. Marydrew did not answer, but followed Jacob to the wicket gate and watched him as he rejoined Winter. William waited until the cart had disappeared and was turning to go in, when a neighbour came up the shining road from Shipley.

It was Amelia Winter in her pattens.

"Did Adam tell you he's wishful to see you to-night?" she asked and Billy answered that he had not.

"Well he is," she said, and put down the big umbrella under which she had come. "He's lending a hand with a heathen lump of stone just now. That forgotten man up the valley be going to put it on poor Margery Bullstone's grave; and for my part I'm a good deal surprised that parson will suffer such a thing in a Christian burial ground."

"They've just gone round the corner—Adam and him and the cart. He was in here storming against his fate a minute ago."

"Not Adam? He don't storm against nothing."

"No—t'other. My old friend. He ain't through the

wood by a long way yet, Amelia. His thoughts and griefs crowd down on him like a flock of foul birds, and shake the roots of his life something shocking."

" 'Tis well if the Lord's Hand is heavy," she answered. "So it should be, if there's justice in the world."

"Try to think kindly on the man. He's suffered much."

"I live with Adam Winter," she answered and went her way.

CHAPTER VI

THE CHILDREN

ACCIDENT sometimes invoked a strange spectre of the old jealousy in Jacob Bullstone—that quiddity of his nature responsible for his ruin. It flashed now—a feeble glimmer of the ancient emotion—and involved Auna. She alone in his opinion cared any longer for him, or felt interest in his fortunes; therefore he was quick to resent any real, or fancied, attempts on the part of others to weaken the bonds between them. Such a task had in truth been impossible, yet there came hints to his ear that the girl should not be dragged with him into the fastness of the moor. He had to some extent lost sight of her natural demands and requirements. He little liked her to be overmuch interested in affairs that no longer concerned himself; but she was intelligent in this matter and, helped by advice, kept in closer touch with her relations than Jacob knew. With her grandmother Auna had indeed broken, for Judith declined to see her any more, and the younger did not pretend sorrow; but with Barlow Huxam, and with her Uncle Jeremy and Aunt Jane, she preserved a friendship they did not report to Mrs. Huxam; while despite harsh sayings against them from her father, Auna continued to love John Henry and Avis. She was loyal, would not hear a word against Jacob, and set him always first. She regarded the coming life at Huntingdon as no ordeal, but a change of infinite promise, because it might bring him nearer peace. Meantime, behind Bullstone's back others were busy in hope to change his plans, and these alternatives were placed before him by his children.

The occasion found him fretful after a period of comparative contentment. He was unaware that time cannot stand still, and in the usual parental fashion continued to regard his family as anchored to childhood. He was smarting under grievances on a day that he met Adam Winter and walked with him from Brent to Shipley.

"There's nothing so cold as the chill of your own flesh," he said. "A child's a fearful thing, Adam, if it turns against a parent, especially when you've kept your share of the bargain, as I have."

"No doubt there is a bargain," admitted Winter. "I speak as a childless man and my word's of no account; but you've been quick to see what you owed your own, and I hope they do the like. If they don't, so far, that's only to say they're young yet. They will get more thoughtful with years."

"Yes, thoughtful for themselves. Young and green they are, yet not too young to do man and woman's work, not too young to know the value of money. Something's left out of them, and that is the natural feeling there should be for their father. Hard, hard and ownself they are."

"Your eldest is born to command, and that sort play for their own hand by reason of the force that's in 'em. Time will mellow John Henry's heart, and experience of men will show him the manner of man his father is."

Jacob grew calmer.

"He loved his mother more than he loved anything, and it may be out of reason to ask them, who loved her, to spare much regard for me. That I grant and have always granted. Yet I've striven to show him now, with all my awful faults, I'm a good father."

"He can't fail to know it."

"John Henry comes of age in a minute and I've made over Bullstone Farm to him. A great position for one so young—eh, Winter?"

"A wondrous fine thing, and what makes it finer is that he's a born farmer and will be worthy of it."

"Kingwell's lease is up ere long, and then my son will reign and be the head of the family in the eye of the nation."

"You mustn't say that. You're the head of the family, not your son."

"He had scarce a word to answer when I told him how I'd been to Lawyer Dawes and turned it over. As for Dawes himself, he feels a thought doubtful whether I should part with my own so freely; but 'no,' I said, 'I understand what I'm doing.' A bit of bread and a cup of water is all I shall ever ask from my children. Let them do what I've failed to do and carry on the name in a proper way. I want to be forgot, Adam; and yet, because they're quite agreeable to take all and let me be forgot, I smart. Such is man."

"Nature and order can't be swept away," answered Winter. "Your children are very orderly children, and no doubt they'll do as you wish; but you mustn't think to go out of their lives and deny them your wisdom and advice. You've got your bargain to keep still, while you're in the land of the living. You mustn't wash your hands of 'em. You must show 'em that you're part of 'em yet, and that their good is yours and your good is theirs."

"They care not for my good—why should they? They don't want my wisdom, for well they know my wisdom is foolishness. Who'd seek me now? Who'd listen to me now, but a few such as you and William, who have the patience of those who grow old and can still forgive all and laugh kindly? No: they are children, and wisdom they need and experience they lack—the more so because the world has run smooth for them. But they don't look to me and they never did. All but Auna were set against me from their short coats. They began to doubt as soon as they could walk. Their grandmother was their god, and they'll live to find she was a false god. They didn't get their hard hearts from Margery, or me."

"Trust to that then," urged the other. "Be patient

and wait and watch, and you'll see yourself in them yet, and your wife also."

"You have a great trust in your fellow-creatures, Adam Winter."

"You must trust 'em if you're going to get any peace. What's life worth if you can't trust? 'Tis to people the world with enemies and make yourself a hunted creature."

"'Hunted' is a very good word," answered Jacob, "that's the state of most of us. As to my children," he continued, "Peter will carry on here with Middleweek, and he's very well able to do it—better already at a bargain than ever I was, and likely to be more popular with customers than I. But my sons have got to make me payments. That's fair—eh?"

"Certainly it is."

"And Auna must be thought upon also. She's first in my mind, and always will be, and she needn't fear, when I go, that she'll be forgot. I've managed pretty cleverly for her, well knowing that she'd not think of such things when she grows up."

"Don't you force her to grow up too quick, however," urged Adam. "Such a far-seeing man as you must not come between her and her own generation, and keep her too close pent if you really go to the moor. Youth cleaves to youth, Jacob; youth be the natural food of youth."

"You're wrong there," answered the elder. "Youth's hard, narrow, ignorant and without heart. I want to get her away for her own sake. She's a flower too fair to live with weeds. She's her mother again. The rest are dross to her—workaday, coarse stuff, wishing me dead as often as they trouble to think on me at all."

Adam argued against this opinion and indeed blamed Bullstone heartily.

"Don't you be poisoned against your own," he said. "The hardness of youth isn't all bad. It often wears out and brings tenderness and understanding with experience."

I'd never fear a hard youngster: it's the hardness of middle age that I'd fear."

And no distant day proved Adam to have spoken well. A certain thing fell out and Jacob remembered the other's opinion, for it seemed that Winter's prophecy came true quicker than even he himself might have expected it to do so. On a certain Sunday in February their father received a visit from John Henry and Avis. The latter did not bring her husband, since the object of their visit proved purely personal to the family.

John Henry drove his sister in a little market cart from Bullstone Farm and they surprised their father walking by the river. Auna accompanied him and they were exercising some puppies. He had just pointed out to the flat rock by the river where Margery was wont to sit, when she took vanished generations of puppies for their rambles; then Auna cried out and the cart stopped beside them.

John Henry alighted to shake hands with his father and Avis descended and kissed him. He was astonished and asked the meaning of their visit.

"You'll catch it from Mrs. Huxam, playing about on Sunday," he said.

"We're not playing about," answered John Henry, "we've come on a very important, family matter—our affair and not grandmother's at all. And we thought we might stop for dinner and tea."

"Come and welcome; but I've done all I'm going to do, John Henry—all for you and all for Avis. You're not going to squeeze me any more."

"We haven't come to squeeze you, father—quite the contrary," declared Avis.

"Leave it till after dinner," directed the young man. "I heard you were fixed beyond power of changing on Huntingdon; but I do hope that's not so, father; because I think there's a good few reasons against."

"What you think is no great odds," answered Bullstone. "And why should you think at all about it?"

"I'll tell you after dinner."

He changed the subject and began talking of his farm. Already he had new ideas.

"I don't see no use in that copse up the valley," he said. "'Tis good ground wasted—only a place for badgers to breed, and we don't want them killing the poultry. But if it was cleared to the dry-built wall—cleared slowly and gradual in winter—it would give a bit of work and some useful wood, and then offer three good acres for potatoes and rotation after. It's well drained by nature and worth fifty pounds a year presently if not more."

"It's yours, John Henry. You'll do as you think best."

Jacob was in an abstracted mood and the sight of all his children met together gave him pain rather than pleasure. They accentuated the empty place and their spirits jarred upon him, for they were cheerful and noisy. He thought that Auna was the brighter for their coming and resented it in a dim, subconscious fashion.

They found him silent and absorbed. He seemed to withdraw himself and pursue his own thoughts under their chatter. They addressed him and strove to draw him into their interests, but for a time they failed to do so. Once or twice Avis and Auna whispered together and Auna was clearly excited; but Avis quieted her.

"I'll tell him myself come presently," she said.

When dinner was done, John Henry spoke.

"Light your pipe and listen, father. You must wake up and listen. I've got a very big idea and I'm very wishful you'll think of it, and so is Avis."

He looked at them dreamily.

"What big idea could you have that I come into?" he asked.

"Why, you yourself and your future."

"Who's put you up to thinking about me at all? You weren't used to."

"God's my judge nobody put me up to it; did they, Avis?"

"Nobody," answered Avis. "It was your own thought, and you asked me, and I said it was a very fine thought."

"Nothing about Auna?"

"No, father. It's just this. I know you don't want to stop here. That's natural. But there's other places beside the moor. And I'm very wishful indeed for you to come and live with me at Bullstone—you and Auna. Then you'd be near Peter, and Avis too; and she could come and go and look after you."

Jacob took it ill. He believed that selfish motives had prompted John Henry, nor did he even give him credit for mixed motives. Then, as he remained silent, another aspect of the proposal troubled him. This woke actual anger.

"To 'look after me'? To 'look after me'? God's light! what do you take me for? D'you think my wits are gone and my children must look after me? Perhaps you'd like to shut me up altogether, now you've got your farms?"

They did not speak and he took their silence for guilt, whereas it only meant their astonishment.

"Where the hell did you scheming devils come from?" he shouted. "Where's your mother in you? Are you all your blasted grandmother?"

Avis flushed and John Henry's face also grew hot. Auna put her arms round her father's neck.

"Don't, don't say such awful things," she begged him; "you know better, dear father."

Then John Henry spoke without temper.

"You wrong us badly when you say that, father. We meant no such thing and was only thinking of you and Auna. You must have stuff to fill your mind. You're not a very old man yet, and you're strong and active. And I thought that you'd be a long sight better with me and with Avis near by and the interests of life around you, than up over in that lonesome hole. It was nothing but a kind view of it."

"Why should you grow kind? Why should you change

your nature? Haven't I right and reason to doubt what motive is under this? 'To look after me'? That's how Winter speaks of his daft brother. I may be daft and small wonder—but—but——"

"Father," broke in Avis angrily, "I'm going to have a baby, and it's very hateful and wicked of you to shout and say cruel things like this to upset me. And it's all lies, because we meant nothing but what was right. We're grown up, and we've got our share of sense and proper feeling."

But he had only heard her first assertion and it calmed him. He stared at her and the anger faded out of his face.

"Why didn't you say so then? That's news."

He looked at Avis gently.

"You married Joe Elvin's son, Robert. Well, why not? Bullstones have wedded with Elvins before to-day. I'm glad you're going to have a little one, Avis, and I command this. If it's a girl, you call it after your mother."

"I mean to," she said, "and if it's a boy, Bob wills it shall be called after you."

"No, no—I forbid that. We'll have no more Jacobs."

But he relented before them and grew mild.

"Come here and sit by me and take my hand," he said to Avis; and then he turned to John Henry.

"If I was harsh, you can overlook it. I'm not the man I was. I'm a good deal fallen down from the man I was. I'm colder than the man I was. I'll give you credit for saying what you said in a right spirit. I believe it. That's your mother in you. But you swear it was your own thought—not whispered to you by Billy or some such well-wisher to me?"

"I swear before God it was my own thought, father; and I say again that if you'll come to live with me, I'd be very glad indeed."

But Bullstone shook his head.

"I'm bound for the only place that can offer peace. Auna and I. And I hope you'll make time as you can and

come and see me now and again. I feel friendly to you and Peter. You know that actions speak louder than words. I hope it will be a girl for the sake of the blessed name. I'll come to the christening. I'll do that. Mark me. I'm a man of my word. You take all care of yourself, Avis, and don't be too busy."

Peter spoke.

"Why for can't you go to John Henry, father? Then we should have you in the midst."

"You know we're all right, father," added the elder brother. "It isn't as if you'd see a lot to vex you, and things being done you didn't hold with. You could come and go and keep your eye on the dogs too."

"I'd like to believe that you could wish it. And I will believe it," repeated Jacob. "I'll make myself believe it, hard though it may be. It's a sign of grace and I'm glad it came into your thoughts. And Avis is going to have a child. That's well. Be sure to call it after your mother if it's a girl."

He stared and nodded and they were conscious that his mind had wandered far from them.

"Let's go for a walk up the valley, father," said Auna. "You always like to talk best in the air."

"I'm going to do so," he answered, "but I'm going alone. You children can stop together, and I'll be back for tea drinking. I'm a good deal shaken by this great thought of John Henry's. It means his mother in him, working up to the surface. And he can thank the Lord she's there. She's in you all. Not that I can change my plans, for my help comes from the hills you must know—such as it is. But that I was wanted at Bullstone is worth a good bit to me,—good payment, you might say, for what I've done."

He left them and they turned anxiously to Auna.

"Is he all right? Is it safe for him to go alone?" asked Avis; and her sister answered that she need fear nothing.

"It's up and down like that. His memory fails him

sometimes in little things. Not in big things. It shook him to find John Henry and you wanting him. But it's done him good already."

"He'll forget about it before he comes back," added Peter. "He'll often go out to think over something, or say he's going to, and then he comes back and you find it's slipped out of his mind altogether."

"But not a great thing like this," promised Auna.

"It's as much for you as for him," continued Avis. "It's not a place for you to be lost in—Huntingdon isn't—and if you have to go and live with him there, he'll very likely end by losing his reason altogether, and it's very bad for a young creature like you."

"Don't you say that, Avis. I couldn't live away from him. And he'll get better I expect. Days often happen when he's all right and his mind quite peaceful."

"It would be a lot more convenient if he went to John Henry," said Avis. "It's clear he finds it too wretched to stop here. I feel it creepy myself—with mother's ghost in every corner, and in the garden too. She was so busy that you can't see a thing without remembering her part of it. But he wouldn't be haunted with her at Bullstone, and we could make jobs for him, and keep him running about and doing something."

"I'd much like it to happen," admitted Auna, "for his sake. It's all one to me where I go, if I see him getting better."

"I'll keep it before him, and speak up for it so much as he'll let me," promised Peter. "Of course it's what ought to be. But I don't think it will. Because loneliness is his stronghold, and the lonelier he is, the better he is."

"You might put old Billy and Adam Winter on to him," said his brother. "He sets store by what they think. Tell 'em the fine offer I've made, Auna, and see what they say."

"I will, then. But Mr. Marydrew is always very strong that father's mind will mend up at Huntingdon. He says

that I must be wits and staff for father, and I will be. And he'll come through. Some day he'll come through, if you and Avis and Peter can show kindness now and then. It's kindness he wants."

"And that shows how rocky his mind is for the minute," declared Peter, "because anything soft, like kindness, was gall to him in the past. He was ashamed of the kindness he did himself. And now his mind has shrunk. He dwells on little silly things and messes about trifles that he links up with mother."

"When is he going to divide her clothes?" asked Avis; "it's a cruel waste and no respect to mother to let things get moth-eaten and useless, that might be worth money to the living."

"I've been at him," answered Auna. "He says that I'm to have the clothes, when I'm grown a bit more, because I'm mother's shape; but that's silly. Now you've been so nice to him, I'll get on about the clothes again to-morrow and very like he'll let me go through them, or ask you to come over and take what you want."

The girls discussed familiar articles of their mother's wardrobe, and Avis indicated much that would be useful to her and the elder Mrs. Elvin. Auna agreed, and while they talked, Peter described his father's habits of mind to his brother. The elder took a gloomy view.

"I don't think he will mend," said John Henry. "I think it's a lot more likely he'll go from bad to worse and become a raving man. There's suspicions moving deep in him. When I told him about this, you remember, he asked if I wanted to have him locked up. People, with softening of the brain coming on, often look ahead in that way and know, by a sort of fearful instinct, what's going to overtake them."

They discussed the kennels and Peter's future.

"He's all right about that," declared Jacob's younger son, "but he's sharp enough for Auna. He told me plain that he didn't trust none of us but her, and that a hair

of her head was worth the lot of us. But now belike he'll change, if he remembers. It was a great thought to offer him to come to Bullstone."

"If you want to please him, John Henry, put flowers on mother's grave now and again," advised Auna. "Her grave will always draw him down from the moor, same as it does now."

They talked until tea time, when Jacob returned, and John Henry went to put in his horse. Their father was now calm and cheerful. He said no more concerning the new suggestion; but he had not forgotten it, for when Avis and her brother were gone and Peter at the kennel, he questioned Auna.

"Can you tell me, faithful and true, that you had no part in what John Henry said?" he asked. "Because if you, or any other, put it into his head, then it's all in vain."

"Nobody put it in John Henry's mind, dear father," she answered. "It was his very own thought."

"That makes it a valuable thing, Auna."

"I know it does. And Avis dearly wants it to happen too."

"And you? Would you rather be with Avis or your brother, or——?"

"Father! You know better than that," she said very earnestly. "You and me are one, and what's right for you is right for me."

"So I think," he answered. "A very clever, deep thought in you to say that we are one."

CHAPTER VII

WILLIAM'S BIRTHDAY

GEORGE MIDDLEWEEK came to see old William with a message and a gift. It was Mr. Marydrew's eighty-fourth birthday and Auna had sent him a very fine ham, and a reminder that he had promised to eat his dinner at Red House.

"You look ten years less than your age, Billy," said the kennel-man.

"We're a long-living race, George. My grandfather was thrice married, and his last he took when he was eighty-two. Gave my old sister the slip, for he was active as a kitten, and nipped off to spend a month with friends in Somerset, and came back with a wife! The woman thought she'd polish him off in a year or two and get his bit of money; but she thought wrong. He lived for ten years and left his cash, such as it was, half and half to me and my sister. His third was a failure, though he was too proud to own it."

"You get into your coat and boots," said George. "If you be coming with me, we must start."

They were soon upon the road and William asked after Jacob.

"Haven't seen him this longful time," he said.

"He's up and down," declared the other. "Says silly soft things one day, so as you think he's growing tootlish; and then, the next, he'll be short and sharp and seemingly all right. He's going through everything that belonged to his wife, and Miss tells me that it shakes him up. He's keeping some of her things for himself. His old ideas

--the stuff he was taught as a child--sticks out now and again. But he's shed most of it I reckon. Life's knocked faith out of him, William, same as it does out of most honest people. But the old stuff elings to him. He'll often say he's a miserable sinner, though in my experience it's only the good people yelp about being miserable sinners. The real, right-down wicked men go on their way rejoicing."

"It ain't the sense of sin makes people miserable, because misery's a matter of character, not conscience, George."

"A very shocking business to say anybody's born in sin," argued Middleweek. "And it's an insult to honest matrimony in my opinion."

"You don't understand religion, and the fall of man, George," answered Mr. Marydrew mildly. "The mysteries of faith are beyond you. Your mind ban't built to hold 'em."

They reached Red House, where Billy thanked Auna for her gift and bade her go on with her work and not mind him, as he was early. But she was glad to stop a while and brought down Jacob from an upper chamber. His present business alternately excited the widower and cast him down. He spoke and thought much of Margery as he handled her garments; and sometimes he was normal and uttered intelligent words; but not seldom his memory tormented him and he said strange things.

"Every stitch dear mother ever wore puts father in mind of something," explained Auna. Then Jacob joined them. His eyes showed that his mind was roaming, but he remembered the occasion.

"A man can wish you many happy returns of your birthday, Billy," he said; "because life's good to you still. You can live on very safely, I reckon. But I'm different from that. It's come over me strong of late that if there's a life beyond, I must get to it soon--else there'll be more trouble. I must be there before a certain other party, William!"

"Leave all that in Higher Hands, Jacob. The length of the thread be no part of our business."

"I must be first, however; I must reach Margery before her mother does. That's commonsense, because we well know that I'd get but a bleak welcome if Judith Huxam had her daughter's ear before I did. She robbed me before, and she would again. A fault in Margery—to say it kindly—to listen to that old fiend. But I don't want her mind frozen against me for eternity. I still live in hopes that we'll be very dear friends, William—so far as a ghost man and a ghost woman can be friends."

"And why not, Jacob? Where there's no secrets hid, the people must surely come together in love and understanding."

"I say these things, because this is one of the days when I believe in a future life. Some days I do and some days I do not. To-day I do; and why do I, should you think? Because my mind is a good deal filled up with my late wife; and if there's any sort of justice and any sort of Almighty Being to do it, then there ought to be a heaven—if it was only for her."

"We found the things she was nearly drowned in to-day," continued Bullstone. "Oh, my God, Billy, what a mad shape life takes, if you see it steady with a glance spread over quarter of a century! For look at it. If Adam Winter hadn't saved her, then four lives hadn't come in the world and my children would never have been born. And what does that mean? It means that Winter is responsible for my children as much as I am; and why for shouldn't they thank him for their existence instead of me? Such thoughts go too deep for the mind of man, William; but if we could understand them, they might throw a good deal of light on life."

"Don't you be silly, my dear. It ain't a deep thought at all, but just a brain-sick fancy. And you mustn't feel no fear about the old witch doctor going to glory before you do. In the course of nature, she'll be called, and

I dare say she'll hate going, quite as much as they uncommon good people often do. By the same token I hear that she and Barlow ain't finding the villa residence all that they hoped and deserved. And I'll tell you for why: you can't alter the habits of a lifetime in a minute and not feel it in mind and body. I know, because when I retired, though naturally rather a lazy old man, I missed my work above a bit, and often did a good heavy day for a neighbour—not so much on his account as my own."

"So you did," answered Jacob. "I'll bear you out there. You sawed a good many hundred logs for me in your time, William."

"Barlow Huxam misses the shop and owns up; but his better half won't own up so far, because that would be to say the wrong thing has happened. And we well know it's a cast-iron rule the wrong thing cannot happen in their tabernacle. Then again she's had a fearful facer, and so's Amelia Winter. A very nasty jar has fallen upon them and it have cast them down a lot. I heard it from Adam Winter himself, and I've felt a good bit amused about it, though sorry for Amelia, because it looks to her as if the end of the world had got in sight."

"Whatever's fallen out, Mr. Marydrew?" asked Auna.

"Why, Adam, after taking a good bit of thought, have chucked the Chosen Few and joined up with the Establishment. And, of course, that means that Sammy have done the same, for what his brother doeth, he does. 'Tis a hugeous shock to Amelia and she's very sorry for all concerned."

"Uncle Jeremy's two little boys have been taken into the Chosen Few," said Auna. "Aunt Jane told me they are received in. So they'll take the place of Mr. Winter and his brother, and the numbers will be kept up."

"The axe is at the root," declared Jacob, "and I'm glad of it. They're a self-righteous crew and it was well within Adam Winter's nature to find them out and leave them. I

hope I'll live to see the end of them, and if that hag died, the hornets' nest would soon empty."

"How's Huntingdon getting on?" asked William.

"I'm waiting for a fine day to ride up over on a pony. But not while the floods are out."

"We've got everything very vitty now," added Auna, "and a nice load of peat stacked by the door, and the new stove. The stores go up after Christmas, and when the stores are in, our things go up."

"Peace—please God peace is in sight," said Jacob, "and I shall have a good few of her treasures around me, William. I find they are a great help to peace. Virtue goes out of these things. I was wondering if it would give her any pleasure to put her favourite junket bowl on the grave, William? Auna's against; but for my part, after deep thinking, I wouldn't be over-sure. All's doubtful with the dead. They may like to know the grey birds are hopping over them for all we can tell. Nobody can say they don't."

"I think mother would a lot sooner that Peter kept the junket bowl at Red House, with all the best china," declared Auna.

"And so I say," replied William. "I believe in very plain graves myself. I like the granite stone. That's enough—just that and the snow-drops to come up every spring. I wouldn't do no more. There's nought so proper as the green spine grass on the dead."

"I'm training some white heather to grow there," answered Auna.

"White heather's for the living, not the dead, my dear."

They came to table presently, ate well and drank William's health. Jacob grew cheerful during the meal and spoke with hope about his family.

"It's a seemly thing for a man in my position to hand over his worldly goods in his lifetime. Then the new generation comes to understand the meaning and obligations of power and rises to it after the manner born. Very

likely, if all had been different and my wife had been spared, we should still have withdrawn ourselves and let the young come into their own."

He preserved an amiable and peaceful manner until the end of dinner and Auna, heartened by his mood, exchanged many pleasantries with William, George and Peter.

Mr. Marydrew praised the little feast when it was ended.

"I've ate far too much for a man my age," he said.

"I'm 'filled as the moon at the full,' Auna, and if ill overgets me, the fault is yours. You'd cram your father's oldest friend like a Michaelmas goose."

Hope arose out of that anniversary for the girl. It proved but a respite between storms; yet she could look back to William's birthday and remember an interlude of peace.

CHAPTER VIII

JEREMY

SLOWLY but certainly Barlow Huxam discovered that his wife was slipping from her old self, and for a time he set it down to age, but then he discovered other reasons for the change in her outlook upon life. Stern she had always been and definite in her pronouncements. She was not wont to criticise and wasted no time in lamenting the evil around her; yet a certain quality of contentment had marked Judith in the past, and now her husband perceived that this failed her. She became very taciturn, and Barlow wrongly decided that this silence arose from the fact that Mrs. Huxam had so little to talk about. The shop had been her solitary subject outside religion, and now, not only was the shop less and less upon her tongue, but the master subject of life seemed sunk too deeply within her to offer material for casual speech.

The disturbance that followed her daughter's death had apparently passed, leaving only a new gravity; but it was not to their common loss that the old postmaster attributed the change. Indeed Margery's death had been a gain to Judith and resolved her greatest and most terrible problem. Then the explanation of the change was, in his own opinion, clearly revealed to Barlow, and he discovered it in his own experience. For he, too, was changed and the expected thing—the peace of retirement, the absence of daily demand upon his energies and time—by no means produced that state of contentment and satisfaction he had anticipated from it. Various causes combined to frus-

trate his hopes and he attributed the disappointment to one reason; whereas in truth the explanation lay elsewhere. He suspected that Jeremy was to blame, and Jeremy certainly did serve to keep him in an atmosphere of anxiety, from which he had supposed retirement would set him free; but beyond Jeremy, and the too certain fact that he was falling short at the post-office, another and a more vital elucidation of Barlow's disillusion lay at his hand.

He was a man without resources and his resolute endeavour, to fill life with his villa residence, had failed him. He worked hard, because work alone made existence tolerable. He laboured in his garden, cut the front patch into stars and moons and planted rose trees and other shrubs. He toiled likewise behind, where the vegetables grew, and raised crops for the house. He read books upon the subject and proceeded intelligently. The work kept his body strong, and the open air made him feel ten years younger; but these energies still left a void, for Mrs. Huxam did not share them. In the old days they had been one in every enterprise. They employed two servants now, and Judith having trained the maidens into her way and introduced them both into the ranks of the Chosen Few, found time hang heavily upon her, the more so that her thoughts became darkened with personal melancholy.

She never complained; she censured Barlow, when sometimes he grumbled that there was so little to do; but she secretly sympathised with him and long before he had arrived at the conclusion that an error confronted them, she was of the same opinion. In his case frank weariness of the present monotony began to whisper the need for change; but her consciousness, that they were making a mistake, was awakened by more than weariness. He wanted something to think about and something more to do, and there was work under his own eyes that called him rather loudly; she also wanted something to do—something to

deaden thought and distract it into other channels than those that now bred an increasing gloom within.

For some time neither would confide in the other, or confess that their present days lacked justification; but Judith had perceived the unrest and discontent in her husband long before he began to suspect her; and she waited, therefore, until his emotions broke out in words. They had passed through nearly a year of the new existence and tested its every phase, when Barlow's wife heard much that she expected to hear, together with much that surprised her.

It was a winter afternoon and she had been reading the Book of Exodus until a passage familiar enough gave her pleasant pause. The fact that One had said the Sabbath was made for man and not man for the Sabbath, had always given her quiet regret; but where authorities differed, her bent of mind inclined Judith to the Old Testament rather than the New. It chimed better with her own genius and uncompromising principles. The earlier dispensation never failed to find her in harmony; and when she read again the Commandment and its drastic and detailed direction, she felt it was enough. Consideration of the texts led to gloom, however. If the Lord found one day in seven sufficient for His rest, how came it about that she and her husband, while still in possession of energy and health, were resting seven days a week?

Upon this question returned Barlow from the post-office and, unaware of the matter in her mind, displayed some irritation. Not until he lighted the gas did she observe that his face was puckered and his eyes perturbed.

"Things are coming to a climax," he said, "and after tea I should like to have a tell, Judy. I'm not at all content with a good deal that's happening."

Mrs. Huxam rang for tea to be brought. Her dark eyes brightened.

"We'll have it and get it out of the way," she said. "And one thing I never shall like here in the planning.

The parlour is a desert island for all you know what's doing in the kitchen."

They ate their meal, which was of a solid character and the last serious food for the day, since they had given up taking supper and found themselves better without it. Then the tea things were cleared, and hardly had the door shut when Mr. Huxam began.

"It's just fifty-three years ago, Judith, since I, as a lad, took the first telegram that ever came to Brent out to Beggar's Bush to the master of the Otter Hounds. I was eleven years old at the time."

"And sixty-four now," she said.

"Yes, we're both sixty-four, and mark this—young for sixty-four. Thanks to our manner of life, I wouldn't say that either of us need count more than sixty in the things that matter."

"So far as this world's concerned, you're right," she admitted.

"Very well then. And now don't get upset or nothing like that; but I'm going to say this: that taking one thing with another, I feel terrible doubtful if our life in this residence is all it might be, or even all it should be."

Mrs. Huxam stared at him with deep interest.

"I half thought your views had settled down. When did this come over you?" she asked.

"It came, as such things do come—gradual. Here a little and there a little, till I was surrounded by a cloud of witnesses, Judy. Granted for the sake of argument—though I won't grant it for any other sake—that we was a bit over-moiled with work and worry, and wanted to get away from the shop and the post-office for a rest and refreshment. Granted we did—what then?"

"Then we've had it," she declared. "We've had a year of it."

"Exactly so; and I'm like a giant refreshed with wine. And I should say you, in your quieter way, was up for anything also. For my part, even if all was suent and

just so with the shop—which it is not—I'd be exceeding pleased to go back thereto, and feel myself in the heart of life and at the helm of my own ship again."

She raised a question, though she knew the answer.

"When you say things are not 'just so,' would you mean Jane, or Jeremy?"

"Jane's all right, as far as it's humanly possible with her growing family. Another coming in April I hear. But she does pretty well, though the stocks are far too low and, of course, she doesn't understand buying; but with regard to Jeremy, it's idle to pretend, and for that matter I won't pretend. He's letting it down—not out of malice, of course, but simply for the reason he lacks the needful qualities. Nobody ever had a better shop manner and a kinder heart, and nobody was ever more wishful to please his customers; but smiles and cheerful remarks about the weather don't take the place of the things people come into a shop to buy; and when a person hears that Jeremy's out of this, or out of that, or don't keep a thing in stock, it won't open the till for him to say the corn is coming on nice, or ask a woman how her baby is. When people want to buy needles, it ain't no manner of use telling them you've got a fine assortment of pins. Jeremy's all right, in a manner of speaking, so long as he's got a better to boss him. The spirit is willing, but the brain isn't built for all the work that must go on out of sight if a business is to pay. In a word he ought to be in somebody else's shop, not his own."

"He's going to let it down."

"He has let it down, and I tell you, when I run over the accounts and lend Jane a hand with the books, my heart bleeds. To see what we made so fine and four-square and the foremost affair in Brent going back, and to know Hasking, at the corner, and that little old maid with the Berlin wools and gim-cracks—Miss Moss I mean—to know such as them are lapping up custom and can find what Jeremy can't—it's a punishing thing.

Very soon I shall keep out of the shop, or else my temper will suffer and I may say what I should be sorry to say."

"I know how you feel about it. My fingers itch every time I pass the window and I want to fly to the shelves when a customer comes in; but well I know that if I did, I'd find little but empty cardboards."

"And no law nor order," murmured Barlow. "Not a thing in its place and many a melancholy five minutes wasted in hunting for what ain't there to find. Last autumn a lot of holiday people were about and I've seen strangers come into the shop full of hope for some everyday thing—socks for their children or sunbonnets or elastic or what not; and then Jane and Jeremy would go pecking about, like a pair of birds in a strange field, and hope would fade off the faces of the visitors, and they'd just creep out. And very possibly, ten minutes after they were gone, what they wanted would be found."

"An unexpected chastening for us," said Judith.

"I know you find it so," he answered, "but what I feel is that the situation may not be past praying for; and that brings me to the tremendous idea that's taking shape in my mind. It came over me like a flame of fire last time I was with the Chosen Few. I thought of what used to be, and my manhood rebelled, and a voice seemed to say, 'It's not too late—it's not too late.'"

He looked at his wife and she nodded and wiped her spectacles but said nothing. Still he fenced with the subject, though she knew to what he was coming.

"How is it you sleep so bad nowadays?" he asked. "I'll tell you, since you don't know. For this reason, because the residence faces different from the old home, and there's a lot more light and air in our present chamber, and the noise of the wild birds singing of a morning strikes in upon you. In our old bedroom we were much more favourably situated, and custom is everything, Judy, and I very much doubt if you can sleep in one room for forty years and more and ever take kindly to another. And

I'll be bold to say that if you was back in our old room you'd know sleep again and wake fresh as the dew on the fleece. All of which only points one way."

"Jeremy was saying not so long ago that he felt to be in a good deal of need of change," murmured Mrs. Huxam. "Not grumbling, or anything like that; but down-daunted and weary. He's getting to look too old for his years in my opinion. Patient and sensible and no temper, but a bit under the weather."

"As we all are when we're over-weighted," answered Barlow. "And if he wants a change, and Jane wants a bit of peace and quiet against April, then I say to you in all seriousness that it's well within our power to let 'em have a change."

"Where to?"

"To the residence! Let 'em come here for a few months, and he can do the garden and Jane can look after her family; and you and me will go back to town. I feel, for my own part, that it would do me a power of good, because messing with rose-bushes and French runner beans—after all it's not man's work for a man like me. But I'm not putting myself forward. I'm thinking a lot more about you, and I well know time's hanging terrible heavy on your hands, else you wouldn't do such a lot of reading and look so wisht over it."

"You voice a good bit that's in my own mind. You can think too much. I think too much; and thought often takes you into places where the spirit had best not to be. We'll make it a matter of prayer if you're in earnest."

"I have been making it a matter of prayer since Christmas," he replied. "I've been taking the thing to the Throne ever since I knew the game was up, so far as Jeremy was concerned. And it wasn't until the prayer was answered that I've broached it to you. I see my way very clear indeed if you do. But your word's my law now as always. The only problem that rose before me was this house, and that won't run away because we go

back to the post-office in the fulness of our strength. Put them in here for a few months, and then, when the Lord's solved the position so far as they're concerned, we can let it for the summer, furnished, for very fair money indeed."

"It's almost too good to be true in my opinion," she said.

"Far from it," he assured her. "It can come true in rather less than no time if you think it ought."

"I'll set it before my Maker, Barlow."

"I'm sure you will," he answered with confidence, "and if you and Him don't see eye to eye, it will be the first time."

He was much elated, for he felt that all must now happen as he desired; and then further fortune fell out to assist the project, for his son came over after closing time, and arrived at a moment perfectly chosen by chance to affirm the situation for Mr. Huxam.

The ineffectual Jeremy trailed his attractive person before his parents, announced that he had come to see his mother and declared that he was very tired; whereupon Barlow judged it politic to leave them for a time, feeling in no doubt as to the nature of his son's mood.

Jeremy began with his usual tact and sympathy.

"Father tells me you don't seem quite yourself, and I was a good deal put about to hear it," he said.

She nodded.

"Who is quite themselves as you call it?" she asked.

"While we're in the flesh, we can't be quite ourselves, Jeremy. Ourselves belong somewhere else far beyond this Vale."

"I know—I know it better and better, as I grow older, mother. I'm in sight of forty now, remember, and if I haven't found out this life is a Vale and no more, it's a pity. Why don't you go down to Uncle Lawrence for a bit and get some sea air?"

She shook her head.

"My body is strong enough—too strong in a sort of way. For it shakes the soul a bit, Jeremy, to see the body living in idleness when it might be doing something useful."

"You've done your mountain of work I'm sure."

"So I have then, but maybe there's a molehill of work still left in me. I'm not easy about it and your father's not easy about it either."

"As for me," he answered, "work's beginning to tell. Jane, catching the light in my hair a few days ago, broke it to me that there's a little bald spot showing to the naked eye on my crown. The beginning of the end I suppose. I'm a very weary man indeed."

"Are you?"

"Yes, mother. My nature properly calls out for rest. I don't solve the problems of life so easy as I did."

"What's the matter then?"

He did not immediately reply, but changed the subject.

"Have you heard what that man, Jacob Bullstone, has done? He made over Bullstone Farm to John Henry on his twenty-first birthday; and he's going to give Red House and the business to Peter presently."

"Yes—not his work but the Lord's. 'The wealth of the sinner is laid up for the just' in Bible words."

"Now there's only Auna of them four—Margery's children."

"I had very near given up hoping for Auna; but that was wrong. Of all the souls I've helped to bring in this world, Auna's the only doubtful one, and I'm going to fight again in that quarter."

"She cleaves to her father, and he's dragging her up to that den on the moors. A very wrong thing, mother."

"Very wrong, and little hope for Auna till we get her away. The time may come. She's much in my mind."

"I went to Plymouth last week to buy a few odds and ends—not for myself—and I looked in and had a dish of

tea with Uncle Lawrence. He's getting a lot older, I find, and a lot less peart than he was. Margery's death hit him very hard."

"No it didn't. He's too steadfast to be hit by the death of a saved soul. He's up home seventy, and his heart is weak, because he lived a very hard life in early manhood following the sea."

"Seventy's nothing for a Pulleyblank. I wonder what he's done with his money, now that poor Margery's gone home."

"I couldn't tell you."

"By rights, me being nearest, I ought to have it."

"He may see it like that."

"I took occasion to tell him that all Margery's children was well provided for—not so mine."

"I don't like this," said Mrs. Huxam. "To be doubtful about your children's welfare is next thing to being godless, Jeremy. You're talking in a very loose sort of way, and to speak, or think, of your uncle's money is indecent."

"Then I'm sorry I so far forgot myself as to do so," he answered at once. "It wasn't for myself; and I'm well able and very willing to look after my own. But there's a cloud. I don't mean Teddy, who will never have the full use of his legs and be a care all his life. He came from God like that, and I can face him according and labour double tides for him if needs must; but I mean a passing thing, though very serious I'm afraid."

"What is it then?"

Again he evaded the great matter and dallied.

"I'll tell you, of course, mother. I'm not a man to run away from trouble. It came over me, strangely enough, in the churchyard, where I went on Sunday afternoon with my sons past Margery's grave. And I properly hate that stone Bullstone has stuck there. It oughtn't to be allowed. And he's set wild plants upon it—just moor weeds. Father's greatly vexed, as well he may be."

"What does it matter? It's a weakness of the weak to garden on graves and fidget over the dust of the dead. Let it go."

"Very different to my brother's grave—so dignified and all that. The face wants a wash: it's gone green, and next Saturday I'll go up and rub it."

Mrs. Huxam had set words from the Wisdom of Solomon on the tomb of her dead son and Jeremy brought them to her mind. She looked back through the years, saw again the sturdy boy, who had died doing his duty, and quoted:

"'He being made perfect, in a short time fulfilled a long time: For his soul pleased the Lord; therefore hastened He to take him away from among the wicked.'"

She kept silence a few minutes, then returned to Jeremy's affairs.

"And what is it that came to you in the churchyard?"

"A very sad shock," he answered. "I did most firmly believe and think, when I followed you and father at the post-office, that I'd come to harbour after all my storms, and was taking up the work the Lord had all along meant me to do. I brought all my strength and a properly prayerful spirit to the great task, and I will say of Jane that she's done her very best from the first and put all she knows into the business. We've been faithful, mother; but the bitter English of it is that faith ain't enough, and work ain't enough, and sleepless thought and care ain't enough—not in a linen-draper's. There's something above all that, and you and father had it, and I and Jane have not. I've fought against the truth and I've not spared myself; but there it is—just the final touch that makes the difference between success and failure. In a word, I've still to find the vital thing I'm made to do. And, as I went through the churchyard, I felt a sudden pang that I was still a wanderer. I wouldn't believe it at first, but Jane's known it for months and I'm very much

afraid that father has. There's an inclination in father to be short and sharp with me, and it has given me many a heartache on the quiet. And now, such is the state of my nerves, that weak nature properly drives me out of the shop on many a day when I ought to be in it. The scent of haberdashery has got to be a curse and puts me off my food."

"It was the same with the smell of the green-grocer's."

"Exactly the same," admitted Jeremy, "and I have come to the conclusion that there's only one shop smell I could ever be easy under; and that's a chemist's. Strong and varied though it is, it soothes. I've been into the chemist's a good deal lately—for sleeping medicine. I must sleep, else I shall be ill. And in the chemist's a calm comes over me. And if I was in a position to do it, I'd take up the subject from the beginning, and burn the midnight oil, and qualify to be a chemist with the sweat of my brow. For that's where the Hand points, mother; and the sad thing is that I was never allowed to see it years ago!"

"Your father and me will turn it over," said Mrs. Huxam. She was neither annoyed nor indignant. All her values changed and her judgment proceeded on a modified code when Jeremy was the subject. "This may be meant," she continued. "There are changes in the air. I wouldn't say but what everything will work out pretty much as you might wish."

"I know what happens will be for the best, and if I must stop where I am, I shall bite on the bullet," answered Jeremy. "Life is real, and never more so, it seems, than when you're in sight of forty. But the idea of being a dispensing chemist—it's like a ray of light through the encircling gloom, mother. There's such dignity to it—a learned profession you might say—and such a power of well-doing! And if, in your deep judgment, that was really hidden all along in the far future for me, then I

should devote all my spare time to study, and rise up early and late take rest, till I'd mastered its secrets and passed my examinations. And once launched into that, there's no doubt I should be a changed man."

"You'd better try some paraffin oil if your hair's falling out," said Mrs. Huxam.

CHAPTER IX

EXODUS

JACOB BULLSTONE suffered a mental relapse before the time of his departure and his friends were sore put to it. They restrained his violence with difficulty. He took no thought for himself, endured much physical hardship and wearied his body. The preliminary journeys to Huntingdon were endless and he tramped, or rode, backward and forward needlessly. Sometimes Auna accompanied him, but oftener he went up alone, on each occasion carrying small boxes, or parcels. Only two persons hoped and believed that Bullstone was right in following his impulse. Billy Marydrew held to this opinion and Jacob's younger daughter agreed with him. Auna faced the ordeal of the coming isolation without fear. In his darkest moments her father did not frighten her and she had by long and close application learned how best to calm his spirit and minister to unspoken needs.

William called at Shipley Farm three days before his friend left Red House, that he might see Adam Winter. For Winter was helping with Bullstone's move. He had lent a cart and would drive it, by a circuitous route that a cart might make from the valley to the heights.

"He's growing childish in my opinion," said the farmer. "His rages are much like a boy's; and yet out of them will flash deeper sense than ever he spoke when he was a happy man. I've known the zanies to say very true things. I've heard my own brother do it. Those beyond comfort themselves can often speak a comfortable word for other people."

"A luckless wretch," commented Amelia. "I wouldn't say but he'll do something red before he's finished. He rolls his eyes—a cruel, bad sign—and George Middleweek says there are days when only Auna dare go near him."

"He's wading through deep waters," admitted Winter, "and we people not called to endure such torment must be patient and prayerful for him."

"He cussed God yesterday," said Amelia, "and George Middleweek heard him do so."

"Think nothing of it," urged Mr. Marydrew. "King David and many another noticeable man have done the same and yet been saved alive."

"The Almighty's wrath properly eats up the ungodly," declared Amelia. "And a very solemn and teaching sight it is for us."

"His patience be greater than His wrath, else not a man or woman could escape," answered William.

"He knows the end from the beginning, and stuff meant for the undying fires won't go nowhere else, patience or no patience," asserted Amelia stoutly; while Mr. Marydrew laughed.

"Why, my dear, you'll be so bad as the old witch doctor herself! What the mischief do you know about the Everlasting's bonfires? Or what goes into 'em, or what don't? No doubt 'tis such fierce opinions be making Adam here escape to the Church of England."

"He'll come back," she replied, looking at her nephew. "He'll soon have enough of that."

"Wisdom needn't be at odds with charity," said Adam. "The Son of Man came to seek and to save that which was lost."

"Exactly so—not to burn it," declared Billy. "Think how we look upon some poor, distracted animal, Amelia—a cow that's dropped a dead calf, or a robbed bird. Almighty God have put His finger into Jacob's brain for the minute, but it don't follow He won't take it out again. I say the moors will tame him and bring him peace. And

mind, Adam, to be very careful carrying his cuckoo clock up over. The clock belonged to his wife and Auna tells me that the sound have a very kindly effect upon him."

"He made a separate journey with the clock himself," answered Winter. "I rode there Sunday, to try and trace out the cart-track. By good chance it's fairly dry going for the time of year. Huntingdon was a proper old rogues' roost when Veale, the warrener, left; but Bullstone have put in a lot of work and got it all whitewashed and water-sweet. He's going to live a labourer's life—everything plain and simple."

"May he soon go out of it and his poor child get back among civilised people," hoped Amelia. "You can't wish anything kinder for that man than death."

"Don't you forget the big, seedy cake for Auna, however," prompted Adam. "I make my first journey for him mostly with stores. He's laying in a lot of tinned stuff, in case they should be snowed up. And I believe he'd like for that to happen."

The great day came at last and the weather proved unpropitious. A heavy fog descended upon the moors and Middleweek, Peter and Adam Winter all advised Jacob to postpone departure. But he would not. Everything was ready and he determined to go.

"I could make the way blindfolded," he said, "and I'll walk in front, and you can come with the carts behind."

They set forth accordingly and Jacob, who took leave of his home without emotion, led the way. One old dog accompanied him and Auna had begged for more dogs later on.

The procession was soon gulfed in the mist, and long before the party reached Huntingdon, every member of it had become wet through. But Bullstone exhibited an amazing good temper. None present had seen him so

cheerful for many days. He made no mistake about the way and when at last the white face of the cottage stared suddenly out of the fog and the naked limbs of the sycamore tree loomed above it, Winter was amazed.

"How you done it I can't say," he assured Jacob; "know the moor as I do, I was lost utterly before we'd gone half a mile."

They lighted a fire and dried themselves, while Peter boiled tea and Auna, at her father's direction, went to her own chamber to change her clothes. Bullstone's first act was to wind up his cuckoo clock. Then they made a meal and ate heartily while the weather grew worse. The fog banks rolled off to the lower ground and heavy rain began to fall. They worked with a will, that Peter, George and Winter might return before night fell. Such furniture as Bullstone had selected for his new home was dragged into the house, where Auna dried it. They made no attempt to order things, but just fetched in the contents of the carts and stacked all in the passage and little chambers.

From above came hammering, for Middleweek insisted on putting up the two bedsteads they had brought. They toiled mightily while the rain beat down and the foul day sank to its close. At four o'clock all was done and the carts started to get homeward in the last of the light.

The partings were brief; indeed Jacob did not say "good-bye" at Huntingdon, for he insisted on returning with them to a certain spot. Once there, a track might be picked up that would bring them to their road. He cared not for the weather, preserved his contented demeanour and expressed very hearty gratitude to Adam, to Middleweek and to his son for their good offices.

He was excited and thanked them all again and again.

"I'll make it up to you," he said. "It's done me a power of good to see what man will do for his fellow-

man at a pinch. Don't think I'll forget such fine service. My turn will come to repay."

As they parted he indicated his intentions. It was clear that he proposed no temporary absence from his neighbours.

"Come the spring we shall meet again, no doubt," he said. "I don't want anybody up over for a couple of months or more. And if there are letters for me, show them to George, Peter, and answer them between you as you think fit. I'll open no more myself."

"Us'll get news of you afore that I hope," answered Winter. "You mustn't cut yourself off from your fellow-creatures altogether, Jacob."

"Why should I be up here then, Adam? What have I done this thing for? I've called on the hills to cover me, and they will do their part if I do mine. Good-bye, all; and if there's a God, may He deal gently with you, my son, and you my friends. Keep edging to the right till you make the big rock and the old quarry—then the way's plain."

"And mind you get out of them clothes the first minute you're back," shouted Adam.

"Fear not; I'm outside the power of weather to hurt," he cried. "I've given weather its chance, but the hand of the elements is held from me."

He was gone and the carts, each with a man at the horse's head, splashed onward.

Peter walked beside Adam Winter. A rare flash of emotion had touched the lad, and the events of the day had broken him.

"'Tis a pretty bloody thing to have a father like that and no mother," he said.

"So it is then; but don't be sorry for yourself; be sorry for him, and hopeful for him. He's got a good sensible family, and it's up to you and John Henry to go ahead and make him proud of you. And very like it will be your work to get him back again in time to come."

"Avis thinks that perhaps, when he knows he's got a grandchild, he'll get a bit more nature into him."

"Very like he will. Billy always swears he'll weather it, and he's looked deeper into your father than we can."

At Huntingdon, Auna was exceedingly glad when her father left her alone for a little while. She had been fighting her tears and would have conquered had he remained—at any rate until she had gone to bed and out of his sight; but when he left with the carts, she broke down and wept. She could not have told why, for she had long grown accustomed to her future and in some moods even welcomed it; but the dour day served to impress upon her youth a side of the time to come that made her weak for the moment. She quailed and abandoned herself to tears; yet not for long. Love dried her eyes, and hope that her father would presently win to peace soon made her brave again. She set about preparing a meal and first brought down a complete change of underclothes and socks and a pair of slippers for him. These she put by the fire, but noticed with some concern that the kitchen chimney smoked and flung puffs from the peat into the room. The wind increased and the night darkened in storm. She began to pull the furniture to its places and lifted an enlarged photograph of her mother on to the parlour mantelpiece. Jacob would like to see that when he came in. She heard him presently moving a crate in the yard and saw him dimly through the gloom carrying it to the cart-shed. Then she called him.

"Do come in and change your things, father," she cried from the window.

"Right!" he answered. "I'm just going to give the pony a bite of hay and see he's settling down."

He soon appeared dripping wet and smiling, with his red dog turned to a russet-brown. The creature was down-cast. It shook itself, scattered moisture, whimpered and crept to the fire. Auna, now cheerful, took a towel and

wiped the dog. Then she left the towel for her father, who had already stripped off his coat and jacket, and bade him get into his warm clothes quickly.

He called her back in twenty minutes and she found that he had obeyed her. He was rummaging in a box of stores for the spirit bottle.

"Four fingers I must drink," he said. "The wet has got into the bones of my neck seemingly."

He swallowed a stiff glass of brandy, and then Auna lighted a lamp and prepared their meal.

"We've come up into a proper gale," said Jacob, "and the harder it blows, the calmer do I find myself, Auna. It'll tire itself out by morning and we'll have a fine day for putting the things in place."

After the meal he pottered about and cleared the passage, while she brought blankets and sheets from boxes, aired them and busied herself bed-making. She found her father drinking more brandy. He had been in the parlour and he had returned there presently, set a candle on the mantelpiece and stood looking at Margery's photograph. She left him there and turned to settling the crockery on the dresser. Then, an hour later, she returned, to find him still standing motionless in the parlour. The wind shouted and some tar-pitched slates on the roof were chattering as though the house shivered.

Jacob at her call woke from his reverie and came to the fire. He had grown very silent. She pulled up his big arm-chair, and he sat down in it and spread his hands to the red peat.

"Like a death-rattle up over," he said. "We must put those slates right, Margery."

He called her by her mother's name sometimes.

"The house is fine and water-proof," she declared. "There's not a drop got in anywhere."

When the cuckoo cried nine, she made supper with cold meat and bread and jam and more tea.

But Jacob did not want to eat.

"We'll turn in," he said. "We've had a hard day. I hope they got back all right. Do you feel pretty peart?"

"Never better, father. I've hotted a brick for your bed, because you're a thought shivery by the look of it."

"Nought," he said. "Only weariness."

"Your leg don't hurt you?"

"Only terrible tired. Can I do anything more for you to-night?"

"No—you get to bed and I'll soon go too."

The old red terrier slept with Jacob, and his basket was pulled out from a pile of odds and ends and taken up to the bedroom. He crept up after his master—a melancholy dog, strange to his surroundings.

"Poor 'Jacko' will soon settle down," said Auna. "Don't forget to put him a drop of water in the soap-dish, father."

Jacob kissed Auna and went up the little stone stairs to his chamber. He was very stiff.

"Look in upon me the last thing," he said, "and bring me up another drop of drink. Make it hot, there's a dear."

He was suffering from slight rigours when she brought him the liquor but Auna did not observe them.

CHAPTER X

FEVER

AUNA went early next morning to see her father, and found him sick.

"I'm very bad," he said, "with chills and heats all night, and stiff in knees and ankles and wrists. It's like that burn-gout Billy had, I fear, only it torments all the joints so sharply that I can't bear the bedclothes upon me."

His face told of pain. As yet he seemed more surprised than alarmed that sickness should have fallen so suddenly upon him. He shrank from her touch and feared even her light hand as she pulled the tumbled coverlet.

"Fetch me some hot drink," he said, "and then we'll think what's to be done."

"There's but one thing to do, father, and that's to fetch doctor to you so quick as ever I can."

"I fear I can't get up, Auna."

"Of course you can't. Don't you talk. Your teeth chatter so. I'll put food and drink by you and then get on the horse and go down."

She left him for twenty minutes, made some tea and brought it to him with bread and butter. He could not eat but drank thirstily.

"A beautiful day, father, and the dog's run home. So soon as I let him out this morning, he was off."

Jacob already began to wander.

"That's a bad sign. The dog may know I'm going to

die. I hope he's right; but I don't feel as if I was going to die."

"No, no, father. It's only a chill along of being wet through yesterday."

"As to your going down, I don't know. We'd better leave it to Nature. I may take a turn presently."

"I hope you will; but you mustn't prevent me going down. It's your duty to try and get well, father, and a doctor would help you."

"Cousins from the Cottage Hospital then—nobody else. But there's no hurry."

Auna, however, knew that she ought not to lose a moment. The way was long and, at best, it must be several hours before succour could be won.

"Tell me just exactly how you feel, because that will help doctor to know what's overtaken you, father."

He explained, but vaguely. She felt that he was in a great fever, and saw that his pain increased.

Presently, to her dismay, he refused to let her go.

"It's come over me that I'm finished," he said. "I believe and hope this may be the beginning of death, Auna. And if that's so, there's no need for you to leave me. I'd little like any other woman to close my eyes. But you must be patient. I'm going to be called to suffer a lot I expect."

For an hour she begged and he denied. Then, to her great joy, she saw a horseman creeping up over the moor in the morning sunshine.

She was sitting beside Jacob with her eyes on the window, when the tiny figure appeared, afar off.

"Father!" she said, "there's somebody coming up over!"

"Bid them be gone, then," he answered. "I only want you."

She left him a moment and ran down. As yet Auna could not tell that the rider was on his way to Huntingdon, but she meant to summon him if possible.

He headed for the Warren House, however, and, while yet he was half a mile distant, she recognised William Marydrew, on his iron-grey pony, and knew that he was coming to Jacob. Immense joy fired Auna at this sight. From an emotion of terrible dread and an inclination to believe that her father would die, she now leapt to hope. No doubt Billy would support her and insist on the doctor being fetched, while he kept the sick man company.

She ran to Jacob with the news.

"Be sure it was ordained for him to come, and it means you are to be saved, dear father," she declared.

At first he was sulky and wished William away.

"'Tis not like him to poke and pry," he said.

But when the old man appeared, proud of his feat in riding up to see them, Jacob welcomed him.

"Don't know which is the most wonderful—you, or your pony," said the sufferer. "Don't touch me, William. I'm in a flame, now cold, now hot, running through my bones; and my heart's beating like a hammer. Something gone wrong and my tongue fills my mouth. I'm hopeful it's the end. But Auna wants the doctor."

"Why, surely. You've caught a fever, Jacob. Put out your tongue. You can always tell by that member if a body's took fever."

Jacob's tongue was very yellow and Auna cried out at the colour. Then William took the girl beyond earshot of her father.

"Get on his horse, because it will go a lot quicker than mine, and go so fast as you safely can to Dr. Cousins. And tell him the symptoms. I don't know what's wrong, but 'tis something pretty large I'm fearing. His eyes roam like a frightened cow's."

Auna was thinking.

"We've got no side saddle, but I handled mother's old clothes only yesterday—her kennel-maid's clothes, which father always kept as a great treasure. Should

you say I might put 'em on, or would it be wrong, Mr. Marydrew?"

"'Wrong!' Belike they was spared for this end! Get in 'em so fast as you can, and I'll saddle your hoss. Every five minutes may make a difference."

She returned to her father's room, where such of Margery's garments as he cherished were already stowed in a chest of drawers.

"I be going to get in dear mother's breeches, father, and ride down," she said; but he was talking to himself and did not hear her. She took the old, brown raiment and went to her room. When William had saddled Jacob's horse and brought it to the door, he hitched the bridle to a hook, set there for the purpose, and ascended again to his friend.

"She'll have a good ride," he said, "for the sun's shining and the wind's lost its edge. And I be going to bide with you, my dear, till she fetches back again."

The sufferer was lying on his back looking at the ceiling and deep in thought. He did not heed William's words, but began speaking quickly and coherently for a time.

"I'm glad you've come, because you can listen to what my life has been, William. And you can understand and tell people when I'm dead. No doubt you were prompted to come up for that purpose. If I can hold my mind on it, I'll tell you."

"Don't you fret your wits just now. Keep your strength to fight."

"It's the end, and I'm glad, and I'm glad that you were sent to hear, and nobody else."

He proceeded to attempt an account of his life, but could not. The fever had touched his mind and he rambled in a growing delirium from which no steadfast argument proceeded. William tried in vain to silence him, but he would talk and he had lost all hold on reality when Auna came in to see him before starting. She was tempted

not to do so, yet a fear that he might pass away before she returned proved too great for her and she came.

"I'm off now, dear father. Be there anything more for me to remember?"

Bullstone started up and his eyes shone at her.

"Margery! There—I knew she couldn't be far off if I was ill. Don't you fret—it's nothing—just a pinch of poison caught somewhere. Put your cold hand on my head—that's right. Sit down, but don't touch my frame."

He tried to put his arm round her and groaned.

"'Tis like a red-hot knife turning in the elbow and wrist," he said. "Going for a run with the dogs? That's right. Mind the water. Oh, my God, when I saw her in Winter's arms, I thought I'd drop, William. Where's my mother? You'd best to call her to me."

"Let her go then," urged Billy. "Don't you keep her now, she's busy."

Auna rose, but Jacob called her back.

"Wait a minute. Where's my wits? We're married now. I don't want mother. I want you—only you. We're married, William. Damn it, old boy, you was at the wedding. Why are you in the kennel-maid's togs, Margery? I don't like that."

"Quite right," declared the old man, winking at Auna. "You get out of 'em, Mrs. Bullstone, so quick as you can. Let her go, Jacob."

"Not to Adam Winter—not to him."

"I'll come back ever so quick," promised Auna.

But a change had come over her father.

"I see it now. You're dead—you're dead, Margery. You've come because I'm going to die. She's dead, Billy. It was only a wishtness—standing there. She's gone!" he continued, as Auna slipped away. "Did you see her too?"

"I see her very plain and beautiful, Jacob; and don't you worry about it. All's well. Where there is Margery,

there is hope—such a hopeful one as her. Just you bide so hopeful as you can and trust yourself to God.”

“Didn’t she have a message? Where did she come from? Oh, Christ, William, I’m in everlasting torture. Would God put a man in hell before he’s dead?”

“Quiet then! Force yourself to lie still and listen to me. I’ll do the talking.”

“Give me something to drink.”

He drank and then he began calling out for Margery.

“Why isn’t she here? Where’s her place but here? Curse the dogs. Aren’t my sufferings more than all the dogs? There’s a bit of flint in every woman’s heart, and we married men are sure to bruise ourselves upon it soon or late. But I’d never have thought—— To put the blasted dogs before me!”

“She’s working for you. She’s gone for the doctor, because you’re ill.”

“The doctor liked her—Briggs, he liked her; but he hated me. I won’t have him. He’d kill me.”

“She’s gone for Cousins—he’s all right. He mended your leg, you mind.”

Jacob sank into silence presently and the cuckoo clock below struck ten.

“Who’s that calling, ‘Margery,’ ‘Margery’? Who is it, William? Not Winter—not Adam Winter now I’m here powerless? I’ll strangle him—God judge me—I’ll strangle him with these hands so soon as my nature comes back to me!”

“He’s all right. ’Tis only the cuckoo clock.”

“I’ve often been tempted to crush it under my feet, William, when it jeered at me in the night season. I’ve laid awake and heard its cursed note—foul—foul—lecherous—and I’ve been hard put to it to remain in bed. But it was hers, and I respect all that is hers, though she doesn’t respect all that is mine.”

“The cuckoo bird means spring. Spring will soon be here, and I shall often ride up over to have a tell, Jacob.”

"You're a very wise man; but it is easy to be wise when life goes straight!"

Jacob's mind had returned into the past. He said things that he had often thought.

"A great test of love, if a woman can put her husband's trade higher than her own pleasure and look at it with his eyes. Few do—few do. Margery felt her own life was more interesting than mine, and who shall blame her? We must be ourselves, William, and that's why marriage is a false contrivance. When the childer are come and the love has gone, it's only self-respect that keeps most pairs grinding on together. For character's deeper than love and we must be ourselves. I thought she liked dogs best in the world after me; but, in your ear alone, William, dogs are nothing to her now. She wants to be herself, and she thinks I won't let her; but if I am jealous of her, God is more jealous still. He takes her side against me, William. She's far more to Him than I am, because she believes in Him and I do not. Life can't be a happy thing for her any more—not while I'm alive. Yet for my honour I can't let her go free while I live. You see that, don't you?"

"Leave it, Jacob, and shut your mouth and try to get a bit of sleep. You must keep all your strength to fight the fever, I tell you."

"The old dog has run back to Red House. He wouldn't have gone if he'd thought I was going to live. He knows he'll be masterless presently, and so he's going to try and make new friends before it's too late. But all in vain. When I'm taken, they'll put him away. I stand between him and death. Fear will be on him when he hears Peter and George speak of me in the past—the fear of those that cumber the earth and know it."

"Could you let down a little more drink?"

The old man descended and brought some tea that Auna had left by the fire.

"We must see to some milk," he said. "You'll be

called to sup a lot of milk I shouldn't wonder. Now I be going to light a fire in your chamber, because you'll have to keep warm for a long time."

Jacob talked for another hour, then became silent. A peat fire smouldered in his room and he fell asleep while William waited and watched.

Auna came back at last and the ancient went down to her.

"Dr. Cousins is on his way," she said, "and he is pretty sure from what I told him that father's got rheumatic fever; and since it has come on so fierce and sudden, he's a good bit afraid. We must put him in blankets and wrap his joints in cotton-wool. He'll bring physic, and he's going to send up a trained nurse to-morrow. I've fetched the cotton-wool and Peter will ride up so soon as he can with milk and eggs from Red House. Our cow was coming next week, but they'll drive it up sooner now."

"All to the good," declared William, "and you get in your petticoats. Best he don't see you in your mother's clothes again, because it works into his fever."

She obeyed; but when presently Jacob awoke and they got him into his blankets with great cost of pain, he still persisted in his illusion and regarded Auna as her mother. He was dwelling entirely in a time before his children had been born. They wrapped his joints in the warm cotton-wool and he grew calmer; but he would not let Auna out of his sight and spoke to her as a dying man to his wife.

"Everything is yours," he said. "Have no fear for the future; but my mother must be your first call. While she lives, Margery, put her first."

"So I will then," said the girl; "don't you fear. I'll take all care of her."

"A good mother and far-seeing. I wish I'd been a better son, Margery. Break it to her gently that I'm going. It's bound to be a shock. But she's had worse."

When the doctor came he spent an hour with Bullstone and gave him medicine that relieved him.

"It's going to be a short fight," he said to Auna presently. "We shall know in a very few days if he will live or die. An attack may last weeks, but in your father's case the turning point will be pretty soon. His lungs are all right and, so far, his heart. In young people the heart often fails under the sudden strain; but at your father's age, this may not happen. You must be hopeful, but not very hopeful, Auna. You'll do just as I say to-night, and Nurse Woolcombe will be up early to-morrow. Keep his mind at rest all you know. He may be quick to respond to the remedies. I think he will be; and, if he is, his pain will pretty soon be less. But he is older than his age and trouble has reduced his vitality. Don't cross him in anything; but make him take his medicine and the liquid food."

"D'you think he'll be spared, Dr. Cousins?" she asked.

"I won't answer that to-night. To-morrow, perhaps, I shall be better able to. Keep up your pluck. You used to do him more good than anybody when he broke his leg; and so you will again. He won't know people for a bit, I expect; and he may say all sorts of wild things while he's off his head; but you mustn't mind."

"He thinks I'm mother."

"Let him. Humour him and watch him like a hawk to-night. To-morrow, when nurse comes, you must turn in and have a long sleep. Mr. Marydrew's going to stop till to-morrow. Don't let him smoke in your father's room though. Now I must be off, or I shall lose myself."

He rode away just as Peter arrived on a pony with full baskets. The lad did not see his father, but learned all there was to know.

"He's going to die I should think," he said.

"Not if Auna and me can keep him alive," promised William, "and be it as 'twill, a few days must pass before

doctor can settle. The fever took him like a tiger and he'll fall, or conquer, afore Sunday."

"Let John Henry and Avis know first thing to-morrow," begged Auna, and her brother promised to do so.

"Will you look at him? He's asleep for the minute."

But Peter declined.

"Can't help him for me to look at him," he said. "I'll get going. We'll send up some more milk and sago to-morrow and hurry 'em about the cow. Be the stove all right?"

"It is," she answered. "It works very well, now the wind's changed, and the fire-grate in his room draws very suent too."

An hour later Jacob woke in delirium. He shouted loudly and they hastened to him.

Fever had peopled the little chamber with monsters based on the real.

"Drive 'em out—where they belong! Drive 'em out—that flock of little women, with black wings and white faces and eyes as hard as stone! They're women—not birds, though they do fly and make the wind whistle, like a flock of starlings. A starling isn't much of a gentleman, but he'll get into heaven before they do—before the little women, because they're all on the pattern of Judith Huxam, the damned. You didn't know she was damned—did you? But I know it and hell knows it."

"Hush, Jacob—don't you talk foolishness," begged Billy; but the sick man knew him not. He turned to Auna.

"Can't you help me? Can't you do anything? If I move a finger it's like dipping it in molten fire. I'm burning alive, and my own wife won't put the flame out. God do so to you, Margery!"

William sighed.

"Us be going to have a parlous night with the poor man," he said. "When do he take his physic again?"

"Half after seven, Mr. Marydrew."

"Well, see if he'll lap a drop of milk. Thank God your

dear father won't be violent except in words, Auna, because it hurts him a darned sight too much to move. We've got him there."

Jacob shouted and they saw that he was drowned in sweat. They ministered to him and presently he grew calmer again. After he had drunk the medicine, William stopped with him and Auna went down to prepare a meal. In another hour Jacob had become unconscious again and the girl and old man ate hastily together below.

"Us must face a stormy night, my dear," said William; "but 'twill pass, however long. Fetch up a good lot of peat, and keep the hot milk and the sago pudden down here; and trust me, if your eyes close, to be on the watch."

"They won't close," promised Auna.

"I've stopped the cuckoo clock," explained William, "because the noise vexed him. We'll be still as death to-night, for silence is physic in itself."

He ate and drank and she bade him take a stiff glass of spirits and water.

"You've done wonders, and I'll never forget it, and no more will father when he's well again," declared Auna. "You smoke your pipe now and have a rest down here, and I'll fetch up the easy, wicker chair, so you'll sit up there comfortable. But you mustn't smoke in his room, Mr. Marydrew."

She went out presently, to feed the ponies, while William lit his pipe, with an ear cocked lest the sufferer should wake.

"Dark and still, and a fox barking far ways off," said Auna when she returned.

Jacob did not wake till nearly midnight and then they wrestled with him for an hour, but made him take his food and physic. He was in agony, yet his mind seemed a little clearer and he restrained himself. Then fever dreams swept over him. Under the light of the shaded lamp, hidden in a corner, he could see his daughter, and still he believed her Margery; but Margery come from

beyond the grave. He thought his wife's spirit was beside him and the belief acted as an anodyne.

"Say you've come for me! Say you've come for me! Say you are going to forgive me and fetch me home!" he cried. And then Auna saw that he wept; so she bent over him and wiped away his tears. Her own fell, too, and when he had lapsed again into insensibility, she crept away and sobbed silently in a corner. This happened in the dead of the night and William, despite his resolutions, was sound asleep beside the fire at the time. She was glad that he slept and had not seen her cry.

She pulled herself together and took heart, mended the fire and sat alert between the two unconscious men while the long night drained away.

Jacob did not waken until four o'clock, with a shout that brought William to his feet.

"Dang my old wig, if I haven't had forty winks," he said, "why for did you let me drop off, Auna?"

CHAPTER XI

JACOB LIVES

A TRAINED nurse arrived before noon on the following day and Dr. Cousins drove her up. The physician found that Jacob was responding to his remedies and no special symptoms of any gravity had appeared. The disease promised to run its course, but whether it would destroy the patient remained to be seen. He was dangerously ill and still delirious. Jacob could not state his case, but the doctor inclined to hope that he suffered less of acute pain. He assured Auna that she had every reason to be hopeful and the nurse, at a later hour in the day, declared the same. She was chiefly concerned with the sick man's reserves of strength and, seeing his powerful frame, felt sanguine.

William went home on his pony after the doctor's visit, and an hour later John Henry and Peter came up together, bringing fresh milk and other comforts. They did not see their father, but they stopped with Auna for an hour or two and spoke of the Huxams.

Great decisions had been made and their grandparents were returning to the post-office, while Jeremy and Jane would occupy the new house for the present, until the time came to let it furnished for the summer.

John Henry now saw through his uncle and spoke scornfully of him.

"A worthless waster—that's all he is—and no good for anything. All talk and smiles and fine manners; and under 'em nothing. He ain't got any brains and he ain't

got any guts; and everybody in the land knows it but grandmother."

"Does she like going back?" asked Auna.

"Yes—else she wouldn't go. I believe she's been at a loose end ever since she left the shop. She hates doing nothing and being waited on. It's contrary to her nature, and she's been very queer lately and frightened grandfather off and on. She'll be jolly glad to get back into the midst of things, and so will he. There's a lot of work in 'em both yet and it's good for their money and for the rest of the family that they're going back. There wouldn't have been any business left if Uncle Jeremy had messed about there much longer."

"To think we thought him such a wonder when we were little!" said Peter.

"When you get up to be a man yourself, you soon see what most men are worth," answered John Henry. "He'll never do anything and, if his children are like him, they'll all go in the workhouse soon or late; and if they're workers, then he'll live on them come he grows old."

Auna asked after her sister and heard that she was well. Then the brothers departed and Peter promised to return ere long.

"In about three days Nurse Woolcombe says we shall know for certain if father's going to live," Auna told them; "but I know now. I'm positive sure he's going to live."

"'Tis doubtful if it would be a good thing," declared John Henry. "I speak for himself, of course. I'm sure nobody wants him to die."

"It will be the turning point for father perhaps," thought Peter. "He might quiet down after a shaking like this."

Jacob Bullstone suffered for many days and it was a fortnight before Auna could find herself sleeping natural sleep and waking without dread. The sick man mended

and fell back again. His strength wore down and a first relapse found him in the gravest danger, for his heart was weary. But he pulled up again with devoted nursing and skilled attention. To Auna, Nurse Woolcombe became as a goddess, and she sealed a friendship with the widow that lasted for life. They worked together and the younger was skilful and understanding.

The head symptoms continued distressing and Bullstone lapsed into delirium on several occasions after periods of sanity. His temperature puzzled the nurse and she strove to distract the patient's mind from himself. But, for a time, he continued impatient and declared that no friendly hand would have desired to prolong his life. Then he grew more reasonable, and when the crisis was past and his sons were permitted to see him, while secretly amazed at the sight of the pallid and shrunken ghost they called their father, both found him peaceful and in a frame of mind they hardly remembered.

His face was white and a growth of beard also helped to disguise the countenance they knew; but his great, dark eyes no longer roamed restlessly over them. They were dimmed by much pain, yet they were gentle and steady. He spoke little and his voice had weakened to a whisper; but he listened and nodded affirmation. His chief concern was with Avis.

"Is her child born?" he asked thrice, at intervals.

"The child's due," said John Henry, "and she's very well, so Bob tells me."

He looked up at the great lads solemnly.

"John Henry and Peter," he said—"my two sons come up to see me. That's good."

"And lots to show you when you're about again, father. You'll be surprised at 'Red House Rover's' new puppies."

"The old dog ran home. He thought I was going to die; but he didn't bargain for doctor and Auna. They've saved me I suppose."

"The Lord of Hosts have saved you, father," declared John Henry, who had great faith in his God.

"Believe it if you can," said Jacob.

They spoke of the Huxams, but found him not interested.

"Is the child of Avis born?" he asked again.

They left him and told Auna that they were well pleased and that he had been kind to them.

"He won't die now; but I expect he'll be a bed-lier for evermore. You've got to face that, Auna," said John Henry.

"So long as he lives till he's at peace, nothing else matters," she answered. "But he'll be better than a bed-lier. Nurse says he'll walk in a month and get back his nature mighty quick, when he can eat strong food again."

Jacob mended slowly and the weather held against him, for the spring was harsh and chill. The light increased with the cold and early March found snow on the moors and a harsh spell of wind from the north-east. The doctor begged Jacob to return to Red House, that his cure might be hastened; but this he declined to do. He was calm and patient now, though very weak. He liked to be alone and he expressed a great desire to see William Marydrew.

Then came good news and Auna had the joy of telling him.

"Avis has got a girl baby, father; and 'tis a beautiful, perfect little child with Bob's eyes. And Avis is doing well and the baby's going to be called 'Margery.' And Margery Elvin's a pretty name Nurse Woolcombe says; and so it is."

The news did Bullstone good service and occupied his mind.

"The name of 'Margery' will be upon my tongue again," he said, "and I must school myself to speak it and hear it, Auna. I shall be very glad to see the little creature. You're worthy to be your mother's daughter, and that's

the highest praise you'll ever get from human lips. And may the child of Avis be worthy to be her granddaughter."

Auna felt very happy. *

"It never rains but it pours, father," she said. "I've had a letter to-day—a letter from Great-Uncle Lawrence Pulleyblank. His writing's gone very spindley and up and down, because he's so old; but when you're equal to it he wants you to travel to Plymouth for the sea air; and if you won't go, then he wants for me to go, when you can spare me for a week or two."

"Wishful for me to go?"

She began to speak, but stopped, since her words would have to deal with the incidents of her mother's death.

"I dearly hope you'll do it when you can."

"No, no; but thank the man. You shall go to him. I won't be so selfish about you as I have been. I've kept your light under a bushel too long, because you were all I had left. Others must share you, I reckon. You're pale as a davered rose through so much nursing. You shall go presently and make a good holiday with the old chap."

He asked constantly for William, and hoped that each fine day might bring him.

"I've got a wonderful thing to tell him, that only such a man would understand," he explained to Nurse Woolcombe.

They concealed the fact that Mr. Marydrew had been ill with bronchitis.

Then Auna went to see him and was able to tell her father that Billy had returned to health, after a chill.

"He's all right and is coming up the first soft day in May," she promised.

Jacob himself began to regain strength, and there fell a morning when Auna went to Brent to bid a barber climb to Huntingdon and shave him.

"He's a proper ghost, and you mustn't be frightened, Mr. Prynn," she said; "but he's going on all right, and now he's wishful to have his beard away."

Yet, before the barber came, Jacob changed his mind again.

"I'll wear it for a sign," he said. "I'll let it be."

At last William arrived and Jacob greeted him with affection. The old man and Auna sat one on each side of his chair and Auna held her father's hand.

"I'm going downstairs again next week," explained Jacob. He was sitting by the fire.

William expressed great pleasure at his appearance.

"A far different creature from what I left," he said.

"Then you was a burning, fiery furnace, my dear. But now you be glad for a bit of fire outside yourself. Can you catch heat from it?"

"And you—you've been bad, too, I'm vexed to learn."

"Only the tubes," explained William. "My tubes was filled up, so as I had to fight for air a bit; but us old oaks takes a lot of throwing. I'm good for another summer anyway. Spring's afoot down the vale."

"I've had great thoughts in the shadow of death, William. I've come through, as you see, and shall live a bit longer. At death's door I knocked and they wouldn't let me enter in. You can't get so close, though, without learning many things. Yet I wouldn't be without what I know. It points to peace—a withered sort of peace, where no hope is."

"You can't live without hope, my dear man. It's so needful as the air you breathe."

"Yes, you can live without it; you can do your duty without it. I heard a laugh yesterday night—'twas myself. Nature made me laugh, because to be without hope is almost beyond reason, and anything outside reason makes us laugh."

William regarded him doubtfully.

"I thought to find you'd thrown over all these silly fancies," he said. "You must keep a hand on yourself, Jacob, now you've come through and are going to live. It's bad to laugh when there's nothing to laugh at. You

mustn't do that. Emma Andrews laughed for three days; and she went down to the river and drowned herself on the fourth."

"I'm all right. Between ourselves, Billy, I had bats in the belfry for a time after my wife died. I know it now and I'm surprised that none marked it. After the trial came a great flash of light to my mind. From within it came and made all the past look dark—burned it to dust and cinders. Only the future mattered, and it wasn't the judge and jury showed me I had been wrong—it wasn't them at all. It was the flash of light. Then hope got hold on me like a giant and I hoped too much. That was my punishment—to hope too much and not see hope had died. But my sickness has drained the poison out of me, and though my frame is weak, my brain is clear. I see and I can put things together. I've come to a great thought—a shattering thing but true."

"A comforting thing then."

"No—truth is seldom comforting. But it puts firm ground under you and shows you where to stand and how to protect yourself against hope. I'm a well-educated man, William, and though I've fallen far below all that I was taught as a boy, I've risen again now. But life's too short for most of us to learn how to live it. Too short to get away from our feelings, or look at it all from outside. But I can now. I've reached to that. I can look at myself, and skin myself, and feel no more than if I was peeling a potato."

William began to be uneasy.

"Leave yourself alone. Have you seen your granddaughter yet?"

"No; but my heart goes out to her. Don't look fearful: I'm all right. I haven't done with my children, or their children. I'm human still. I can take stock of myself, thanks to my forgotten wisdom—lost when Margery died, and found again. A bit ago I was growing awful cold. I felt not unkindly to the world, you must know, but cold

was creeping into me, body and soul. I didn't love as I used, nor hate as I used, nor care as I used. I didn't want to see what I couldn't see, nor do what I couldn't do. All was fading out in a cold mist. Then I had my great illness, and there was no more mist, and I began to link up again with the world. Nothing could have done it but that. And then I got the bird's-eye view denied to most of us, but reached by me through great trials.

"For look at it, Billy. First there was my faulty nature and little experience. No experience of life—an only son, kept close by loving parents—and with the awful proneness to be jealous hid in me, like poison in a root. Then fate, or chance, to play trick after trick upon me after marriage and build up, little by little, the signs of my great, fancied wrong. Signs that another man would have laughed at, but proofs—deadly proofs of ruin to my jaundiced sight. And the cunning, the craft to heap these things on my head—all shadows to a sane man; but real as death to me! First one, then another—each a grain of sand in itself, but growing, growing, till the heap was too heavy for me to bear.

"And whose work was it? 'God' you say, since He's responsible for all and willed it so. God, to plan a faulty man and start him to his own destruction; God, to make me love a woman with a mother like Margery's, so that, when the wounds might be healed, there was that fiend ever ready and willing and watchful to keep 'em open. God, to will that I should never hear my wife forgive me, though she had forgiven me; God, to let her die before I could get to her and kneel at her feet!

"No, William, a tale like this leaves a man honest, or else mad. And I'll be honest and say that no loving, merciful, all-powerful Father ever treated his children so. Mark how calm I am—no fury, no lamentation, no rage now. Just clear sight to see and show the way of my downfall. Your God could have given me a pinch of fine character to save me. He could have made me more generous, more

understanding of my pure wife, less suspicious, less secret, less proud, less mean. He could have built me not to head myself off from everything and bring back night and ruin on my head. But no.

“We’ll allow I got all I deserved—we’ll confess that as I was made cracked, I had to break. But what about Margery? Did she get what she deserved? Did she earn what she was called to suffer—a creature, sweet as an open bud, to be drawn through dirt and horror and things evil and foul to early death? Was that the work of the all powerful and all just?”

“Always remember there’s the next world, Jacob.”

“Can fifty next worlds undo the work of this one? Can eternity alter what I did and what she suffered here? The next world’s no way out, William. The balance isn’t struck there, because evil never can turn into good, either in earth, or heaven. You can wipe away tears, but you can’t wipe away what caused them to flow. And where have I come to now, think you? Another great light I’ve seen, like the light that blazed to Paul; but it blazed a different story to me. When I see a man praising God, I’m reminded of a mouse that runs to hide in the fur of the cat that’s killing it. I no longer believe in God, William, and I’ll tell you why. Because I think too well of God to believe in Him. D’you understand that? I wish He existed; I wish we could see His handicraft and feel His love; but let us be brave and not pretend. The sight of my little life and the greater sight of the whole world as it is—these things would drive God’s self into hell if He was just. He’d tumble out of His heaven and call on the smoke of the pit to hide Him and His horrible works. And so I’ve come to the blessed, grey calm of knowing that what I suffered there was none to save me from. It’s a sign of the greatness of man that he could give all his hard-won credit to God, William, and invent a place where justice would be done by a Being far nobler, finer, truer and stronger than himself. But proofs against

are too many and too fearful. The world's waiting now for another Christ to wake us to the glory of Man, William, because the time has come when we're old enough to trust ourselves, and walk alone, and put away childish things. We deserve a good God—or none."

The ancient listened patiently.

"Your mind is working like a river—I see that," he answered. "But be patient still, Jacob. Keep yourself in hand. You'll find yourself yet; you be on the right road I expect; and when you do find yourself, you'll find your God was only hid, not dead."

He uttered kindly thoughts and they talked for an hour together. Then Auna and William descended to the kitchen and he ate with her. He was happy at what he had seen rather than at what he had heard.

"Forget all your father says," begged William. "He's going to be a strong and healthy man. I mark the promise in him. A great victory for doctor and you and nurse. There's a bit of fever in his mind yet; but the mind be always the last to clean up again after a great illness. His talk be only the end of his torments running away—like dirty water after a freshet."

"Do you think, if we could get him down to see Margery Elvin christened, it would be a useful thing, Mr. Marydrew?" asked Auna, and William approved the idea.

"By rights he ought to go to Church and thank God for sparing him," he said. "But, be that as it will, if he saw his grandchild made a faithful follower and heard a hymn sung out and the organs rolling, it might all help to do the good work."

"I'll try to bring it about, though it may be a very difficult thing to manage," she said.

"You make a valiant effort," urged William, "and tell your sister to hold over the event till her father's man enough to come down and lend a hand."

He returned to Jacob before he left Huntingdon.

CHAPTER XII

THE CHRISTENING

ON a day six weeks later, Jacob went down among men and, at the desire of his children, attended the baptism of his grandchild. The families assembled and the time was afternoon on Sunday. All interested, save Judith Huxam, were present, and after the ceremony ended, a little company trailed up the hill to Owley, that they might drink tea together and cut the christening cake. Avis and Auna walked side by side and Auna carried the baby; while behind them came Peter, Robert Elvin and his mother. John Henry had joined his Aunt Jane Huxam and her little boys; Jeremy and Adam Winter followed them and Jacob Bullstone, with Barlow Huxam, walked fifty yards in the rear. They talked earnestly together and Barlow had the more to say.

He was full of great anxieties, yet did not fail to express regret at his son-in-law's illness and satisfaction that he had been restored to health.

"A triumph for your constitution and the doctor's skill. I've thought upon you and not left you out of my prayers," he said.

"Yes; I've come through; and it was worth while. Time will show," answered Jacob.

"A thoughtful moment, when first you see yourself as grandfather," commented Barlow, "and still more so when you've only got to wait till a little one can talk to hear yourself called 'great-grandfather.' That's how it is with me now."

"How d'you find yourself taking up the reins at the post-office once again?"

"The power is still there, thank God," answered Mr. Huxam. "But time don't stand still. Life goes pretty light with me, but in confidence I may tell you it doesn't go so light with my wife. You don't understand her and I don't expect you to do it, Jacob; and she don't understand you; but you've been through heavy waters; you've brought forth deep things out of darkness, in Bible words, and I may tell you that all's not right with my wife. She was a bit cheerfuller at first, when we went back into harness and let Jeremy and his family go to the residence, but it was a flash in the pan. Judy's brooding again and speaking in riddles, and I'm much put about for the future—the future here below I mean—not in the world to come."

Bullstone spoke quietly of his own thoughts on the subject of his mother-in-law.

"I've hated your wife with a deadlier hate than I thought was in my nature," he said. "But not now. Before I had my great illness, I always hoped to see her face to face once more and have speech with her; because I was much feared of a thing happening, Barlow. I'd meant to see her alone and warn her, by all that she held sacred, to play fair if she got to Margery before I did. Such was my blinded sight, then, that I thought it might lie in her power, if she went on before, to poison my wife's mind in heaven, as she did on earth, so that if I came I'd still get no forgiveness. But that was all mist and dream and foolishness, of course. If there was a heaven, there would be no bearing false witness in it. But there's no heaven and no meetings and no Margery. It's all one now. Things must be as they are, and things had to be as they were, because I'm what I am, and Judith Huxam is what she is."

"A very wrongful view," replied Huxam. "But, for the minute, your feelings are beside the question, Jacob,

and I'm not faced in my home with any fog like that, but hard facts. And very painful and tragical they may prove for me and all my family. You'll understand that she never could forgive the fearful day we journeyed to Plymouth—you and me; and she held that I'd gone a long way to put my soul in peril by taking you there to see your dying wife. That's as it may be, and I've never been sorry for what I did myself, and I don't feel that it put a barrier between me and my Maker. But now the case is altered and I'm faced with a much more serious matter. Judy don't worry about me no more and she don't worry about any of us, but, strange to relate, she worries about herself!"

"I've heard a whisper of it."

"You might say it was the Christian humility proper to a saint of God; but this mighty gloom in her brain gets worse. Once, between ourselves, it rose to terror, at half after three of a morning in last March. She jumped up from her bed and cried out that Satan was waiting for her in the street. That's bad, and I spoke to Dr. Briggs behind her back next day."

"Her religion was always full of horrors, and the birds are coming back to roost."

"That's a very wrong view and I won't grant it," answered Barlow.

"Who can look into the heart of another? Who can know the driving power behind us?"

"It's not her heart: it's her poor head. Briggs is watching over her and he don't like it any more than I do. There's a well-known condition of the human mind called 'religious melancholy,' Jacob; and it's a very dangerous thing. And it's got to be stopped, or else a worse state may over-get her."

"She looks back and mourns maybe? Perhaps it's only her frozen humanity thawing with the years."

"She don't look back. Never was a woman less prone to look back. She looks forward and, owing to this

delusion of the mind, she don't like what she sees and it makes her terrible glum. Her eyes are full of thunder, and her voice is seldom heard now."

"We reap what we sow."

"Not always. She's walked hand in hand with her God ever since she came to years of understanding, and it's a hard saying that such a woman deserved to lose her hope and suffer from a disordered mind."

"It's not a disordered mind that loses hope, Barlow—only a clear one. Hope's not everything."

"Hope is everything; and if the mind weakens, then the life of the soul stops and there's nothing left but an idiot body to watch until its end. I've got to face the chance of Judy's immortal part dying, though her clay may go on walking the earth for another twenty years; so you'll understand I'm in pretty deep trouble."

"It may not happen."

"It may not. But I'm warned."

Jacob expressed no great regret, for the things that now entered his mind he could not, or would not, utter.

Mr. Huxam pursued his own grey thought.

"Sometimes it happens that these people who are overthrown by religion, by the dark will of their Creator, have got to be put away from their friends altogether; because too much religion, like too much learning, topples over the brain."

"Perhaps it's only conscience pricking her."

"In a lesser one it might be that; but to hear such a woman as her wondering in the small hours whether, after all, she is redeemed, that's not conscience—it's a breakdown of the machinery. 'Could I lose my own soul by saving Margery's?' she asked me once, and such a question of course means a screw loose."

Bullstone did not answer and Barlow presently feared that he might have said too much. He sighed deeply.

"Keep this from every human ear," he begged. "I may be wrong. There may be a high religious meaning in

all this that will come to light. We must trust where only we can trust."

"You'll find where that is, if you live long enough and suffer long enough," was all the other answered.

A cheerful spirit marked the little celebration at Owley and, for the first time, Jacob held his granddaughter in his arms. He had brought a gift—a trinket of silver with a moonstone set in it—that he had purchased before their marriage for Margery.

Auna and her father walked home together afterwards up the long slope from Owley to the moor. He was calm and gracious and they spoke of the girl's coming visit to her great-uncle.

"I wish you'd change your mind even now and come along with me," she said. "You'd do Uncle Lawrence good very like."

"No, I shouldn't do him good, and a town's too great a thought for me yet a while. Not but what I want to do a bit of good, to return a little of all that's been done for me. But opportunity doesn't lack. I'll get in touch with my fellow-creatures slow and gradual, one by one. They frighten me too much all together. They always did; but I'll come back to them, like a ghost, presently."

"You're not a ghost any more. Look how fine you stood among the people to-day, and how pleased they were to see you," said Auna.

"Jeremy's going to drive up and fetch you Monday week. He's a gentleman at large for the minute. Idleness always finds that man at his best."

"But he'll be a chemist next, and he's reading about it already. He says that the goal's in sight, and he feels that, as a dispensing chemist, he will come out like the sun from behind a cloud."

"A very ornamental man, but would have done better as a tree, Auna. There's many a human would have given more pleasure and less trouble as a tree in a wood."

Auna laughed.

"He'd have been a very good-looking tree—one of the silver birches perhaps."

"Margery Elvin is now of the Household of Faith," said Jacob suddenly.

"And weren't she good when parson took her, father?"

"I shouldn't wonder, if all goes well, whether I don't go down and see her again when you're away."

"I do hope you will then, and write me a letter to say how you are."

"I shall be full of thinking about you. I have thoughts about you. I am going to make you happy."

"Be happy yourself and I shall be."

"No, that can't happen; but I'll make you happy another way than that. I can look ahead as I never did before. It will come in good time. Patience is greater than happiness. I'll go back into the world some day. But my soul must be quiet—quite quiet for a little longer yet, Auna, please."

Jeremy came at the appointed time to drive his niece into Brent. She was going to spend one night with her Aunt Jane at the villa and proceed next morning to Plymouth. To the last moment she was busy with arrangements for Jacob's comfort. They had a milch cow at Huntingdon, and Bullstone milked it himself. A red dog had also settled down with him.

Jeremy was anxious about his mother, but turned to another subject as he and his niece journeyed down the hills together. Auna had waved her last farewell to her father and he had waved back. Then Jeremy touched a personal matter.

"I want for you to sound Uncle Lawrence about his money," he said. "You're a clever and understanding girl and can be trusted. It's time his family knew his intentions, Auna, and you might be doing a useful thing if you were able to get a word out of him."

"If he says anything I'll remember it," she promised.

"I hope he'll live for a long time yet; and when he's got to go, I hope you'll have the money, if you want it."

"I'm thinking not of myself, but my children, Auna, and your Aunt Jane."

"I'll send the boys post-card pictures from Plymouth," she promised, "and I'm hopeful to send some fine fishes to father if I can."

CHAPTER XIII

THE PROMISE

THREE men were talking at Shipley Bridge, and one prepared to leave the others and ascend to the Moor. But he was in no great hurry. Adam Winter and old William listened to George Middleweek, who had come from Red House. His talk concerned the Bullstones and he spoke of Peter.

"He's wise for his years, but I laugh to see the real boy moving and feeling behind the parrot cry of what he's been taught to say and feel. A young woman has turned him down at Brent. She loves somebody else and haven't got no use for Peter; and he damns his luck one minute, and the next says that everything that happens must happen. But it's taking him all his time to believe it as well as say it, and, meanwhile, nature will out and a dog or two have had to yelp for Master Peter's troubles. The sorrows of the dog-breeder be often visited on the dog I reckon."

"Life runs over a lot of innocent dogs, no doubt," said William, "and leaves 'em mangled and wondering what they've done to be disembowelled, just as they thought they was being so good and faithful."

"To a man of Peter Bullstone's mind, the thought that a girl could refuse him is very vexatious I expect," admitted Adam. "His mother's family ain't out of the wood yet. My Aunt Amelia tells me that Judith Huxam was caught by Barlow going to the police-station to give herself up for fancied crimes! It looks like they'll have to put her away."

"That's what God brings His Chosen Few to, Adam!"

"No, George. You mustn't say things like that in my hearing, please. All that happens is part of the pattern, and who can judge of the pattern from the little piece under his own eye? Not the wittiest man among us."

"Cant!" answered George. "But if that woman's drove mad—her, who have driven so many others the same way—then that's one to the good for your precious Maker, Adam: a bit of plain justice that us common men can understand."

They spoke of Jacob Bullstone.

"He'll be excited to-day I shouldn't wonder," said George, "because his daughter is going back to him this evening. Peter drives in for her presently."

"Auna wrote me a letter full of woe," William told them. "She's one of they young hearts from which even us frozen old blids can catch heat. What d'you think? Her Great-Uncle Pulleyblank's minded to make her his heir, and she's prayed him to leave his money to her Uncle Jeremy, because he wants it and she don't! But Pulleyblank knows his Jeremy too well I hope."

"And Jacob seems as if he was more in tune too," declared William.

"He's doing kind things to lonely people—such as don't run up against much kindness as a rule," explained Adam. "The lonely have a way to smell out the other lonely ones. He sits very quiet now for hours at a time, perched on a moor-stone so still as a heron."

The master of Shipley got upon his horse, which stood tethered under an oak beside the hedge. Then he rode off to climb the waste lands, while the others went on their way.

Winter had come to dinner with Jacob, and he found him cheerful and exalted before the thought of his child's return.

He explained his hopes and purposes, but with diffidence.

"If men, such as you and Marydrew, still think well of

it, I don't say but what I might slip back again to some quiet spot," he said. "I shouldn't feel that I'd got any right, exactly, to thrust in again among folk—such a thing as I've grown to be; but if it was only for William's sake, I'd come. He always held out that I'd be saved for some usefulness, and I'd like to make good his words."

"Comé then," urged Winter, "don't go back on it."

"I'm a thought clearer sighted than I have been, Adam, and more patient. How's Samuel? I understand him now so well as you do yourself."

They talked of common interests, but Bullstone grew restless as the sun went westerly, and he did not seek to stay his guest when the farmer rose to return.

"I've got everything in fine fettle for her—for Auna," he explained. "She's coming back from her sea-faring to-day. Peter goes in for her and she'll walk along alone from Shipley, and the boy will be up with her box to-morrow morning. The moor's in a cheerful mind to-night, but I dread to hear her say she likes the sea better."

"No fear of that while you kennel up here. But I hope we shall have you both down before autumn."

"Yes, faith, I shall creep down."

They left Huntingdon together, Jacob walking by Winter's horse for two miles. They parted, then, in the gracious glow of evening, and the elder sat upon a shelf of rock and waited. Far beneath him the sun fires lingered over the pavilions of a larch grove and warmed the young green to gold. The untiring cuckoo called a while, then grew silent as twilight stole delicately over all things and detail died.

He saw Auna at last—slim and swift, ascending on quick feet. And then she had come, put her arms round his neck, kissed him, and looked into his eyes with the warmth of her steadfast worship.

"Is your soul quiet now, dear father?" she asked; and he replied:

"Yes, faith, it's quiet now, my dinky maid."

She sighed with satisfaction.

So they went up together, hand in hand, through the cool curtain of dusk; with fret of light and shadow all vanished for that day. They went up speaking very few words into the deepening bloom of night, while on the sky glimmered the stars again, and in the grass a glow-worm. From his stony place among the fern, churn-owl throbbed a lullaby for the whole, drowsy earth; and he touched their human hearts, old and young, with the mystery of his music—the mystery of all living songs that waken when the rest of the world is going to sleep. The two notes whirred on, rising and falling, fainting and trembling out again.

Then the white face of Huntingdon looked upon them.

"It shan't be your home much longer—I promise that," he whispered; but as yet Auna knew no other love than love of him.

"Where you are is my home, father," she said.

Hysterical = exaggeration

Don't - take to heart

Don't let the thing

how that I'm too old to dream,
I have you to remember
how that I'm too old to dream
your love still comes in my heart,
So Good-bye my dear,

and though we have to part,

~~when~~ how that I'm too old to dream,
your love still comes in my heart.

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